

**BRITAIN AND STRATEGIC PLANNING TOWARDS A SECOND
FRONT, JUNE 1940 – JANUARY 1944.**

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Abstract.

In its original proposal, this thesis aimed to examine the wartime policies of Winston Churchill and his influence on Britain's decision to campaign throughout North Africa and the Mediterranean region and to assess whether his motivation was to preserve what remained of the British Imperial System following the military reversals of the Second World War. However, the problem with this original idea was that there was not enough primary material available on Churchill in New Zealand and it would have been difficult to import material from the United Kingdom and elsewhere within the timeframe allowed for a Masters thesis and at too great a cost. Therefore, a new direction was required and in 2003, the focus began to shift towards the Second Front because the literature on British and Allied campaigns in the Mediterranean so often referred to it and due to the amount of primary sources that are available at the University of Canterbury and that allowed for detailed research on this subject.

Although the Second Front opened in 1944, it has its origins following evacuation of the British Expeditionary Forces and units of the French military from the Continent in 1940. Even in defeat and faced with the prospect of invasion, the British began to examine the possibility of their forces re-deploying across the English Channel and the circumstances under which an operation of this kind could prove successful against the Wehrmacht. The prospect of a re-deployment to North-West Europe became central to Britain's strategic planning throughout the four years that followed yet Churchill and his military commanders devised alternative plans and sought to prevent the Axis forces from taking control of the Indian Ocean region and the Middle East. The purpose of this thesis is to ascertain the British stance towards the Second Front between 1940 and 1943 and to determine whether they were in favour of it or not and if so, what reasons did they have for not committing forces. It also addresses how the divisions between London and Washington concerning the Second Front influenced the dynamics of their alliance and how it came to symbolise the transforming international political and military

landscape, the decline of British power and the ascendancy of two countries that would shape the post-war environment known as the Cold War.

INTRODUCTION.

Historiographical Review and Thesis Outline.

The Second Front in North-West Europe, codenamed Operation 'Overlord', opened on the morning of 6 June 1944. Following naval and aerial bombardment of the German defences, nine Allied infantry divisions¹ disembarked along a 50-mile stretch of Normandy coastline between the Cotentin Peninsula and the Orne River. Overlord not only marked the beginning of the Allied ground campaign to liberate Western Europe from German occupation but it was also the first time that large-scale British infantry divisions had fought in France since the evacuation of the Expeditionary Force and remnants of the French Army four years earlier. In his book, *Second Front Now – 1943*,² Dunn argues that political considerations rather than military ones influenced the timing of the Second Front and that the United States and Britain had assembled superior forces to the Germans by 1943. Yet they sought not only a German defeat and fewer casualties amongst their own troops but the operation had to commence at a time when they believed that the German offensives had sufficiently weakened the Soviet Union as not to pose a threat to them in the post-war era. Hence, the West delayed opening the Second Front for twelve months as "Politically, 1944 was the best year – the initial landing involved little loss of life or material on the part of the West, and yet the West was left in control of nearly half of Europe when Germany collapsed. On the basis of military capability, according to American military leaders, the second front was possible in 1943, if not in 1942. A German surrender in late 1943 would have saved Germany from the heavy bombing of 1944 and 1945 and spared Russia much of the devastation that resulted from the battles of those years".³ Consequently, the delay provided the Germans with a vital twelve-month window of opportunity in which to rebuild their forces stationed in Western Europe and they "gained relatively more military capability than did the

¹ The assault force that landed in Normandy on D-Day consisted of five American, three British and one Canadian Division.

² Walter Scott Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. (Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 1980).

Western Allies during that period. The German army in France was very weak from April 1943 until February 1944. By June 1944, the Germans had increased their strength in the West considerably, while the Allies had fewer troops on hand, insomuch as there were fewer British divisions available. The Germans moved men to the West during 1944, but no new American divisions were formed after 1943. In effect, while the Allies sat for a year, the Germans rebuilt".⁴

While proposing that the Western Allies sought an emaciated Russia, Dunn also questions their justification that shortfalls in the number of landing craft they possessed, the lack of training for their divisions and equipment shortages prevented them from deploying forces to North-West Europe in 1943. He claims that the British High Command formulated this argument based on estimates of Allied military strength in 1942 and it failed to take into consideration the future capability of American industry. The result was that a lack of confidence developed among British generals as to the quality of their forces and this served to increase their opposition to a cross-Channel enterprise. By the end of 1942, the United States and Britain had overtaken Germany in their military production as the Reich had made little use of the industries within the occupied countries in the first two years of the war. However, under the direction of Albert Speer, "German production improved both in quantity and in quality, because the captured nations' industry was utilised and millions of non-Germans were recruited into the war effort as workers, service troops, and even combat soldiers. Even though Germany could not overcome the preponderance of the Allies, the invasion of 1944 was more difficult that it would have been a year earlier".⁵

The pressure on the Churchill Government to commit to the Second Front increased as the Soviet Union and the United States entered the war. Both countries favoured it as the means best suited to defeating Germany but each held their own reasons. For the Americans, the Second Front offered a strategy through which they believed the Allies could inflict a swift defeat on Germany before turning their attention to campaigning against Japan in the

³ Ibid. 3-4.

⁴ Ibid. 4.

⁵ Ibid 6-7.

Pacific Ocean. Meanwhile, Moscow's agitation stemmed from the Soviet Government's view such an operation would draw German units away from the Eastern Front and relieve the pressure on the Red Army having suffered a series of defeats throughout 1941 and 1942 at the hands of the Wehrmacht.

Despite the United States maintaining a policy of neutrality until Pearl Harbour, its military planners began covert meetings with their British counterparts as early as January 1941. What emerged from these sessions was the 'Germany First' policy under which American forces would establish a defensive perimeter throughout the Pacific until they could transfer the bulk of their forces from Europe following the surrender of the Third Reich.⁶ Both countries formulated plans for possible operations over the course of the next twelve months that if implemented could have seen large-scale Allied forces invade North-West Europe in advance of 1944. These operations, code-named Operations 'Round-Up' and 'Sledgehammer' became issues for dialogue and division between the Allies and had these operations proceeded then the Second World War may possibly have followed a different course. Yet as Dunn contends, "the energy of the European forces was siphoned off into a campaign that could only end in the Alps and offered no serious threat to the German industrial vitals"⁷ and plans such as Round-Up, Sledgehammer and other proposed assaults became the forerunners to the Second Front rather than its manifestation.

The Allies began to explore the possibility of operations in North Africa despite this planning process and as 1942 and 1943 progressed, Britain's attention and especially that of Brooke⁸, began to shift more towards the Middle East and Mediterranean theatres. Dunn writes, "Believing nothing could be done in Europe, the British searched elsewhere for a victory. To clean up Libya and to protect India, the British planned to send three hundred thousand men overseas between February and March 1942, taking them away from the potential European invasion force". The dispersal of British

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 7.

⁸ Alanbrooke, Alan Francis Brooke, 1st Viscount, 1883-1963, entered the artillery in 1902 and saw service in the First World War. Having studied mechanised warfare during the inter-war period, he was appointed commander of the 2nd Army Corps in France in 1940. Following the fall of France, he was commander of the Home Forces and he became Chief of Imperial

infantry divisions throughout North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia was an effort on the part of the government and military hierarchy to protect what remained of the country's spheres of interest, but also as a ploy to force the Wehrmacht to disperse its forces rather than having to engage them in combat directly. Britain also invoked the use of blockade and aerial bombardment designed to degrade Germany's economic and industrial capacity and erode civilian morale while its action throughout North-West Europe was limited to a series of commando raids conducted by its Special Forces.

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the development of Britain's policy towards the Second Front from June 1940 until January 1944 and ascertain the reasons why its forces did not participate in a cross-Channel invasion during that period. In order to this, the thesis will examine whether this was because Britain lacked the military capability to re-deploy to Europe given the losses incurred by its forces in 1940 and that it faced the subsequent threat of invasion. The other possibility is that the government and Chiefs-of-Staff did not possess the resolve fearing the consequences that a failed attack would have on civilian and military morale, the armed forces' combat wherewithal and the possible political ramifications for Churchill's administration. Wilmot's examination of this issue contends that even as the Expeditionary Forces returned from the Continent in 1940, the government and its military planners recognised that Germany needed to be defeated if victory was to be achieved, or at the very least, a situation created whereby the German Government sought peace terms favourable to London. For this reason, the British began to explore the feasibility of their forces crossing the Channel and under what the conditions they could prevail against the German units stationed in the West.⁹ However, if the government and Chiefs-of-Staff believed that a cross-Channel enterprise was necessary to bring about a conclusion to the war as Wilmot suggests, then under what circumstances would they have permitted the assault to proceed and why do they not appear to have presented themselves before 1944?

General Staff the following year. He served in this post until 1946 becoming Viscount Alanbrooke that same year.

Historiography.

The issue of the Second Front in North-West Europe is a much-discussed topic within existing literature and study and one upon which authors offer different perspectives. Butler maintains that the policy of attrition and harassment of Germany offered the British the most effective method available for continuing the war without risking another possibly fatal defeat following Dunkirk. His reasoning is that for Churchill and Brooke, “the North African project was much more than a mere compromise or second-best solution. It was the first move in the application of a classical strategy whereby the superior power at sea uses its mobility to compel the enemy superior on the major land-front to disperse his forces in order to meet attacks favourable to the assailant”.¹⁰ With the Germans holding the dominant military position on land in 1942 they could have utilised their East-West communications system to deploy their forces rapidly to France in sufficient numbers that would have been capable of repelling any Allied assault. On the other hand, their communications system that ran on a southern configuration was not as advanced. Butler argues that if the British could force the Germans into dispersing their forces southward then they would not be able to redeploy these formations easily and this dispersion of strength would clear the way for a cross-Channel enterprise. This view became Allied policy in 1941 in that “an essential feature of the strategy agreed at Washington, based as it was on a memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff, was to close and tighten the ring round Germany and gain possession of the whole North African coast”.¹¹ The Western Allies believed that only the Russians could undertake any large-scale offensive action against Germany in 1942 along their front but they agreed that they must be prepared “to take advantage of any opening that might result from the war of attrition to conduct limited land offensives”.¹² Butler goes on to record: “the British delegates on their return from Washington reported that the President ‘set great store’ on the organisation of

⁹ Chester Wilmot. *The Struggle for Europe*. (London, Collins, 1952). For further examination of this point, see Chapter 3.

¹⁰ J.R.M Butler. *Grand Strategy. Volume 3, Part 2*. (London, H.M.S.O. 1964). 563.

¹¹ *Ibid.* 564.

a combined Anglo-American expedition to North Africa, and for some weeks 'Super-Gymnast', as this scheme was called, received much attention".¹³

Leighton's analysis of this issue goes further than that of Butler in that he raises doubts as to whether the US and Britain were fixed between two divergent and competing strategies and is critical of scholars who have in his opinion portrayed them as having "fundamentally opposed national strategies".¹⁴ He claims that that the Allied strategy "blended in to a pragmatic compromise. The Mediterranean sideshow, indecisive in itself, forced the Germans to spread and waste their waning strength, to the benefit of Overlord. Yet, even with the Mediterranean diversion, anything less than a "power play" Overlord would have failed to break the crust of the German defences in the West. Happily, the Allies did not have to rely solely either on a "peripheral" Mediterranean strategy leading up to "mop-up" with Overlord or on a "power play" Overlord without diversionary preparation in the Mediterranean. They combined pragmatically the strong elements of both strategies, discarding the weak, and victory was theirs".¹⁵ Leighton labels the approach of those who conclude the Allied decision-making process was one of division and debate as 'fusionist revision' and he writes that, "we now know, for example, that responsible British leaders never advocated an Allied "invasion" of the Balkan Peninsula and that the "Balkans vs. Western Europe controversy" referred to by many post-war writers is a myth".¹⁶

His rationale is that the British regarded the Mediterranean campaign as a necessary prelude to any invasion of North-West Europe, not the primary Allied strategy and fully accepted that a cross-Channel enterprise was the only way of defeating Germany. Therefore, "this position was not inconsistent with their candidly expressed fears that an inadequately prepared and supported cross-Channel assault might end in a blood bath, nor with the hope persisting as late as November 1943, that when the time came a full-scale assault might prove unnecessary. Their commitment to cross-Channel

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Richard M. Leighton. 'Overlord Revisited: An Interpretation of American Strategy in the European War, 1942-1944'. *The American Historical Review*, Vol. LXVIII, No. 4, July 1963. 923.

¹⁵ Ibid. 924 – 925.

¹⁶ Ibid. 922.

invasion concept is attested to by the enormous investment of shipping, forces, facilities and material they poured into the preparations for the operation. It is also reflected in their insistent demands, during the 1942-1943 debates over the size and shape of the invasion, for a stronger assault and a larger allotment of landing craft that the Americans, with one eye on the Pacific war, were willing to provide".¹⁷ Leighton also makes the case that the division between the two countries was not as severe as that proposed by other scholars. Instead, "it is perfectly clear from the records that even the military leaders, once committed to the Mediterranean by the entry into North Africa, yielded more or less reluctantly to the logic of momentum and events and supported the successive campaigns in Sicily, Italy, and, of course, southern France. Some of them, in midsummer of 1943, even urged an all-out effort in the Mediterranean, at the expense of preparations for a cross-channel invasion, to exploit Italy's impending collapse. Meanwhile, despite earlier agreement that the war in Europe had first claim on Allied resources, during 1943 the Americans were carrying on an expanding, not a holding, war against Japan, at considerable cost to their effort in Europe".¹⁸

While Leighton implies that the blame lies with the American effort in the Pacific Ocean, Dunn points to political concerns as being the motivation for the West not opening the Second Front in 1943 or earlier. Despite that, "After Kursk in July 1943, there was no German strategic reserve at all. Even before July, the immense Russian build-up in the area would have prevented the Germans from transferring sizeable reserves to the West"¹⁹ he maintains that Churchill's desire that a weakened Soviet Union emerge following the conclusion of the war took precedence over the military advantage which the US and Britain held over the Germans. To support his case he asks, "Would the invasion have succeeded in 1943? The chances of any venture are determined by comparing the two contending forces. The possibility of a successful invasion was a matter of weighing the number of German forces and their capabilities against the number of Allied forces that could be delivered on the French coast. Many half-truths were told concerning the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 922 – 923.

military situation, for example, the problem with landing craft was not that there was a shortage, but that equipment had been needlessly sent to the Pacific theatre. Furthermore, the British cracked the most secret codes of the Germans, and from 1940, the British had a complete knowledge of the German plans and troop movements. Certainly the West knew its own resources and, with full information concerning the enemy, could have struck a neat equation".²⁰ Not only did Germany gain time to mobilise their own industries and those in the Occupied Territories into greater production but also the delay did result in enormous ramifications for Europe in the post-war era. Had the Western Allies opened the Second Front in 1943 then they could have prevented Stalin from seizing the territorial spoils that he reaped in the following two years and, according to Dunn, "it is possible that Germany could have been defeated before the Russians had completely occupied Poland, providing the West with the opportunity to return the Sikorski government-in-exile. At the least, a Western hold on most of Germany would have given Churchill and Roosevelt a far stronger hand to play in the negotiations in 1944".²¹

According to Howard, the discourse between the US and Britain on this issue lay in the difference in their military doctrines. He claims that American military dogma held that a country, or an alliance of countries, must concentrate its maximum force at a single point against an enemy if it is to achieve victory and that, "American and British military authorities, in fact, approached the problem of devising a strategy for the defeat of Germany from different ends. The British began with mobilisation and deployment of forces, assuming that circumstances would determine where the decisive engagement would occur – if indeed any such clear 'decision', easily identifiable in time and space, proved necessary at all".²² In contrast, "the Americans, on the other hand, started by deciding where the decisive engagement should occur, worked back from there to their plans for deployment, and from there to mobilisation of resources. Only if they knew

¹⁹ Walter Scott Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. (Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 1980). 266.

²⁰ Ibid. 4.

²¹ Ibid. 1.

what kind of war they were going to fight, they argued with some reason, could they decide what kind of weapons to procure and what kind of forces to raise. It was this difference in approach, and not any conflict between 'manoeuvre' and 'mass', that underlay most of the subsequent disputes between the Allies over strategic planning".²³ Howard concludes that the British viewed the American strategy as being incomplete. Although this plan identified the objective and destination for the attack, the British contended that it overlooked the difficulties associated with transporting troops and the costs involved in confronting a much more powerful Wehrmacht that also enjoyed air superiority over the intended battlefields. The fact that many of the senior British commanders, including Brooke and Dill²⁴, had served with the B.E.F. in 1940 strengthened this case but according to Howard, the Americans begged to differ. They believed Britain's strategy to be "indecisive and peripheral, haunted by the memories of the slaughters of the First World War and of the early defeats in the Second. They doubted whether Britain's military leaders, even Churchill himself, staunch as they were in defence, were prepared to make the sacrifices necessary for a victorious attack; and as the war went on their doubts did not decrease".²⁵

The idea that Britain's strategy was 'peripheral' in its design is echoed by Kimball who writes that the British "viewed the war from a unique geographic perspective, that of their worldwide Empire."²⁶ The Philippines aside, the United States had not faced the loss of significant portions of its overseas territories and its government and military establishment had no interest in British and European efforts to recover the empires, which they viewed as archaic and repressive. There was a suspicion infusing this view, for example

²² Michael Howard. *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*. (London, Greenhill Books, 1993) 22.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Sir John Dill, 1881-1944, saw action in the Boer War and First World War. In 1936, he was promoted to Lieutenant General by the British Government and sent to Palestine to restore order. In 1940, he commanded the 1st Corps in France but was recalled to Britain in April to serve as Chief of Imperial General Staff. Churchill relieved him of this post due to his poor health and, having been replaced by Brooke, he was posted to Washington as representative of the British Chiefs of Staff. He died on 4 November 1944 and became the first non-US citizen buried at the Arlington National Cemetery.

²⁵ Ibid. 23.

²⁶ Kimball. *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*. Volume 1. 458.

on the part of King²⁷ and Hopkins²⁸, that the British were only concerned with using American forces in the Middle East to rebuild their Imperial System and spheres of interest and preserve them intact for when the war had concluded. The Western Alliance also held differences of opinion regarding the level of assistance that they should offer to the Soviet Union. Britain and the US increased their aid shipments to Russia as the war progressed, but the United States used the risk of a German victory in the East to advocate a possible cross-Channel enterprise. Throughout the duration of the first Washington summit that opened in December 1941, the German armies pressed on Stalingrad and Roosevelt feared that the Soviet Union would be defeated before the United States had time to mobilise its forces and industry as to have a bearing on the course of the war.

In the event of this occurring or had Germany's economy, political system or military complex began to disintegrate from within through the effects of the Allied blockade and aerial bombing, the United States earmarked Operation Sledgehammer as a possibility in 1942. This would have involved a small-scale landing with the objective for the Allied divisions being to divert as many German units into Western Europe from the east as possible then disembark. A second possibility, codenamed Operation Round-Up and scheduled for 1943, would have been a larger enterprise involving the establishment of a permanent beachhead and the widening of the Allied assault force to thirty US divisions and eighteen British divisions along with six thousand aircraft and seven thousand landing craft. Greenfield, Butler and Dunn argue that Sledgehammer was not an appealing proposition to the British, as they would have been required to provide the bulk of the eight to ten divisions needed and due to time and logistical constraints, the American involvement would have been limited to two and a half divisions. Butler claims that Brooke was

²⁷ Ernest King, 1878-1956, joined the US Navy in 1901 and served on the staff of the US Atlantic Command. In the inter-war period, he became a submariner, Commanding Officer of the aircraft carrier *Lexington* before becoming the commander of the Navy's air division with the rank of Vice Admiral in 1933. In 1941, he became Commander of the Atlantic Fleet before being promoted to Commander in Chief of the US Navy. Following the Battle for the Atlantic, King's attention remained on the war in the Pacific Ocean until 1945 when he retired due to ill health.

²⁸ Harry Lloyd Hopkins, 1890-1946, was Secretary of Commerce from 1938 to 1940 and Roosevelt's special envoy to Britain. He was also a member of the War Production Board and was Roosevelt's Special Assistant until 1945. That year he helped arrange the Potsdam Conference under Truman however, he retired from public life shortly after and died in 1946.

concerned that a deployment of this scale combined with units deploying to other theatres would have left the Home Islands vulnerable to any belated German incursion and both he and Dill maintained that German fighting morale remained unbroken. Butler also states that the operation's success would have relied on the Allied assault force succeeding in opening a port followed by a rapid advancement into the Ruhr area. However, given the limited numbers of their forces taking part it was unlikely that the Allies would be able to have captured a port until at least two months into the operation and even then, there was no guarantee that this would be possible. Added to his equation was the question of withdrawal and Mountbatten, who in 1942 was in command of Combined Operations, was particularly critical of any plan that would have involved disembarkation or a scenario where the Allied forces fought until the last man.²⁹

While Howard claims that Brooke was supportive of Round-Up following the abandonment of Sledgehammer, Grigg and Dunn contend that he was the principal supporter for the switch in emphasis from Europe to the Middle East and North Africa, hence the inconsistency and varying interpretation within the research. Grigg insists that Churchill was out-manoeuvred by his CIGS whose "mind was set against any Cross-Channel operation in 1943, and in favour of unlimited activity in the Mediterranean"³⁰ and who dismissed the Marshall Plan as not being feasible. Both authors claim that Brooke held that Britain's shipping capacity was over-stretched, that the Allies lacked the landing craft with which to proceed and that the Germany military would not be weakened through its Russian campaign for the Second Front to be successful in 1943. Instead, the C.I.G.S.³¹ insisted that the Allies' best chance for success lay in the Mediterranean. This according to Dunn was an error of judgement on Brooke's part because by 1943 the German military was struggling to deal with the demands of a Russian counter-offensive and its logistical over-stretch throughout such a vast territory.³² Therefore, there was a distinct possibility that Round-Up would have achieved success. Grigg's analysis supports this argument and he claims that "the Germans were no longer, on balance,

²⁹ Butler. *Grand Strategy. Volume 3, Part 2.* 570.

³⁰ John Grigg. *1943: The Victory That Never Was.* (London, Eyre Methuen, 1980). 212.

³¹ Chief of Imperial General Staff.

weakening the Russians on the Eastern Front, but were themselves under such pressure there that it would be out of the question for them to transfer any substantial forces to the West".³³

Butler, on the other hand, deems that the circumstances of the war proved disadvantageous to those supporting a cross-Channel enterprise as Marshall's visit to London in April 1942 was "of the utmost importance in the development of the grand strategy of the Allies. Agreement was reached for the first time as to an invasion of the Continent, and on a grand scale; it was the beginning of integrated operational planning; it was the first meeting of Marshall³⁴ and Brooke, the American organiser of victory and the Prime Minister's principal adviser on strategy. It was of immense value to the Allied cause, but in a way it was unhappily timed".³⁵ Dunn is less diplomatic. His view is that "inconsistently, Brooke found twenty miles of the channel an insurmountable obstacle for the Allies, but feared that the Germans could join with the Japanese more than ten thousand miles away".³⁶

Churchill welcomed the news that the United States had entered the war but with a new ally came a new adversary and impending catastrophe for the British military and empire. Britain's formal declaration of war on Japan, issued on 8 December, coincided with the first air raid on Singapore and the opening of the Japanese push into northern Malaya. The offensive began with an air assault designed to incapacitate the R.A.F. squadrons based at a series of aerodromes throughout the north of the country. The British lost sixty out of one hundred and ten planes in the first wave of attacks with many of

³² Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. 11.

³³ Grigg. *1943: The Victory That Never Was*. 63-64.

³⁴ George Catlett Marshall, 1880-1959, saw action the Western Front in the First World War and was an aide to General Pershing from 1918 to 1924, before serving in China until 1927. Following his return to the US, he was head of the Civilian Conservation, a programme designed to tackle unemployment among young men and in 1938, with the rank of Brigadier General, he became Deputy Chief of Staff. In 1939, he was appointed Chief of Staff by Roosevelt. Although he oversaw the expansion of the American armed forces and had a significant influence on the course of Allied strategy, he was disappointed not to have commanded the Allied forces on D-Day and he resigned from his post in November 1945. Following the war, he served as ambassador to China and became Secretary of State under Truman in 1947. It was in this role that he devised the European Recovery Programme also known as 'Marshall Aid' and in 1950 he became Secretary of Defence and organised US forces in the early stages of the Korean War. Marshall was attacked at the McCarthy hearings in 1951 as being soft on Communism and he retired from politics that same year.

³⁵ Butler. *Grand Strategy. Volume 3, Part 2*. 575.

³⁶ Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. 11.

their aircraft caught on the ground. The rapid deterioration of the Allied position in the Far East meant that Churchill ordered the deployment of forces to Southern and South-Eastern Asia in an effort to stem the Japanese advance. Even though Marshall and Eisenhower were particularly critical of such a move, 1942 was a year of military disaster for British arms and Britain's lowest point of the war and as Grigg states: "in the Far East, disaster followed disaster with bewildering swiftness."³⁷ Within six months of the first Washington Conference, the Japanese had captured Hong Kong, the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, Burma and the Dutch East Indies in rapid succession and had dealt the Americans a severe defeat in the Philippines. Their forces spread as far west as Midway Island in the Pacific Ocean and Japanese planes bombed Darwin. Grigg claims that this rapid advance "enabled the Japanese to threaten both Australia and India. But above all it was a shattering psychological blow, from which the British Empire never recovered".³⁸ The Japanese conquest was not only on land. With the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse on 8 December 1941, the Japanese had mastery of the Asian waters and they began to push heavily armed units into the Indian Ocean.

On 5 April of the following year, Japanese naval planes attacked the port at Colombo in what Kimball regards as an operation by the Navy designed to persuade their Army counterparts to embark upon an invasion of Ceylon. The raid caused the British Government to fear that a Japanese breakthrough into India was possible and Churchill implored Roosevelt to dispatch US naval units to the region to reinforce the British fleet stationed there, as it was inferior to its enemy in number and firepower. His telegram to the President on 15 April stressed the threat that Japan posed to the Western Indian Ocean and his fear that this could force a collapse of the British forces in the Middle East.³⁹ Churchill was concerned that should Japan gain control of the Western portion of the Indian Ocean they would sever the main southern supply route to Russia along with the source of oil from the Middle East. Kimball claims

³⁷ Grigg. *1943: The Victory That Never Was*. 29.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 29.

³⁹ Kimball. Volume 1. 453.

that the British also feared that this could push Turkey into the war as an Axis combatant and that this would increase pressure on Russia's southern flank.

However, even when faced with such a critical situation, Churchill demonstrated that he was a man who refused to be committed to one operation alone. In a telegram to Roosevelt on 17 April following the talks with Marshall and Hopkins, the Prime Minister tried to hedge between the American demands for a European campaign and the need to stabilise the British position in the East: "it is essential that we should prevent a junction of the Japanese and the Germans. Consequently, a proportion of our combined resources must for the moment, be set aside to halt the Japanese advance. This point was fully discussed at the meeting, and Marshall felt confident that we could together provide what was necessary for the Indian Ocean and other theatres, and yet go right ahead with your main project".⁴⁰ Churchill went onto claim that preparations for an invasion of Europe were moving forward and that the Allies could bring the enterprise forward if circumstances warranted it. He wrote: "broadly speaking, our agreed programme is a crescendo of activity on the Continent, starting with an ever increasing air offensive both night and day, and more frequent and larger scale raids, in which United States will take part".⁴¹

On 28 May 1942, Churchill sent a telegram to the President in which he informed him of Mountbatten's visit to Washington with a summary as to the difficulties of undertaking a cross-Channel assault at that point in time. Kimball writes that the substitute Churchill proposed was an invasion of Norway codenamed Operation Jupiter. In his telegram, the Prime Minister wrote: "I have also told the Staff's⁴² to study a landing in the north of Norway, the occupation of which seems necessary to ensure the flow of our supplies next year to Russia".⁴³ Jupiter was to prove too ambitious for Churchill yet he held an option in reserve because in that same telegram the Prime Minister reminded Roosevelt "we must never let Gymnast pass from our minds".⁴⁴ According to Howard, Roosevelt "was equally determined that an operation of

⁴⁰ Ibid. 459.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Chiefs of Staff.

⁴³ Ibid. 494.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

some kind must be launched by American forces in the European theatre in 1942"⁴⁵ and the President was favourable towards North Africa following reports from US diplomatic staff in Algeria that any landings there would be welcomed or at least unopposed by the Vichy French.

Both Howard and Dunn record that Marshall and Eisenhower objected to Churchill's plan for Jupiter and Gymnast that he presented on 19 June at the Second Washington Conference. As a trade-off with London, Marshall suggested that the US send Sherman tanks and artillery to the Eighth Army so that Egypt could be stabilised especially after Rommel captured Tobruk on 21 June. However, the President's decision was final and as Leighton points out "as commander in chief, Roosevelt was the supreme American strategy maker when he chose to play the role. He was thus an essential part of the strategy-making process, not an influence external to it, a fact sometimes obscured in staff-orientated accounts of World War II strategy".⁴⁶ Leighton and Howard share Dunn's view that political considerations now played a decisive hand. While his military commanders did not concur with the British view that the Mediterranean and southern Europe was the Continent's soft underbelly, North Africa presented Roosevelt with a theatre in which US forces could be sent into action against the Germans in the short term future. It also offered the President the opportunity to demonstrate to the Soviet Government that the US and Britain were prepared to engage in combat and that the Soviet Union was no longer fighting the Germans alone. If Sledgehammer and, as a consequence, Round-Up were not possible then North Africa offered the next best alternative.

Dunn maintains that the decision to abandon the Second Front in 1942 led to the dispersion of Allied resources to other theatres and that there was also a major re-structuring of the Allies overall strategy for the war. Along with the build-up of forces for the Mediterranean, the Americans began concentrating an increased number of their military in the Pacific and offensive operations against the Japanese commenced. MacArthur and King had advocated this approach since the US had entered the war. Throughout July and August

⁴⁵ Howard. *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*. 30.

⁴⁶ Leighton. 'Overlord Revisited: An Interpretation of American Strategy in the European War, 1942-1944'. 928-929.

1942, the US began a campaign against the Japanese on Guadalcanal and New Guinea hence “the British were not the only ones who turned the hoped-for single thrust of Allied strategy into a diverse random spray of enterprises around the globe. Admiral King, General MacArthur and Roosevelt were not certain that the Americans would complete Bolero, the plan to move a million troops to England, and be ready to invade France in 1943”.⁴⁷

Leighton offers the opinion that the increased resources sent to the Pacific was due to the expansion of US industrial production rather than the demands of King, MacArthur or even Marshall. He claims that Marshall supported King in his calls for more commitment to the Pacific but the General “gradually became more receptive to a forward strategy in the Mediterranean, but only within the framework of limited allotment”.⁴⁸ Leighton states that Roosevelt recognised that a Mediterranean offensive would allow for a decisive cross-channel crossing once Torch had commenced. Consequently, “American strategists found it increasingly difficult to deny the merits of further advances in the Mediterranean, in order to hold the strategic initiative and maintain momentum, to keep Spain and other neutrals in line, to clear a passage for shipping to Suez, to knock out Italy, to pin down, disperse, and bleed German forces or attract them from other fronts”.⁴⁹ The Allied intervention throughout the Mediterranean expanded throughout 1942 and 1943, instead of contracting as Marshall and Eisenhower might have hoped and by May 1943, the forces under Alexander had entered Tunisia and the Mediterranean was coming under increased Allied control. In the exhilaration of victory, the Western Allies and the British especially, were eager to exploit a series of successes that until that year had eluded them. Howard writes that the British caution over the potential for action in Italy was “apparently forgotten”⁵⁰ while Leighton claims that “for the first time, American strategists could envisage a continuation of Mediterranean offensives through the following winter and spring, along with a mounting combined bombing campaign against Germany. The new concept centred on a drive up the

⁴⁷ Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. 18.

⁴⁸ Leighton. ‘Overlord Revisited: An Interpretation of American Strategy in the European War, 1942-1944’. 928.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 930.

⁵⁰ Howard. *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*. 37.

Italian Peninsula that would turn westward to link up with another force landing in southern France, followed by a push up the Rhone Valley to a junction in spring 1944 with the main invasion army advancing eastward from Normandy".⁵¹

The influence that the United States had on Britain's policy once it entered the war is a foremost issue that arises from the historiography. Kimball's work in particular emphasizes the impact that Washington had on determining Allied strategy as the war progressed along with the division that existed between the two countries regarding the opening of the Second Front and the works of Dunn, Grigg, Howard and Leighton are weighted heavily towards examining the dynamics of trans-Atlantic Alliance as well. However, this historiography also raises the question that Washington entered the wartime alliance beset by conflicting opinions amongst its own senior military hierarchy as to which course of action to advocate. Howard's claim that US military doctrine held that the Allies focus their resources into a single, large-scale formation compares with Dunn's account that Marshall and Eisenhower favoured such an approach yet contrasts with Wilmot's view that Roosevelt wanted American forces engaging the Germans in 1942 rather than waiting until a later date.⁵² This ambiguity within the US strategy and the discourse with the British over which region the Allies should their commit forces led to the situation that Leighton describes as a "pragmatic compromise"⁵³ under which Allied forces went to several theatres in an effort to placate all parties. Dunn and Grigg also discuss this issue and both regard Brooke as the prime mover of the Allied decision to disperse resources outside of Europe and failure to cross the Channel in either 1942 or 1943. The other factor apparent from this historiography is the manner in which Britain's situation in 1940 influenced the level of support for the Second Front on the part of its political and military leaders as opposed to deploying forces elsewhere instead. The literature suggests that Britain's commanders, most notably Brooke and Dill, believed that any cross-Channel assault would not succeed against a Wehrmacht that they perceived as being more powerful in relation to their own

⁵¹ Leighton. 931.

⁵² Wilmot. 101.

⁵³ Leighton. 923.

forces and an enterprise of this nature would have left the British Mainland vulnerable to a German attack. Hence, a reiteration that between 1940 and the onset of 1944, the lack of military resources, resolve on the part of the political and military leadership or a combination of both factors determined Britain's policy towards the Second Front.

In order to do provide answers to this hypothesis, the thesis divides into five chapters followed by a conclusion. The first chapter provides a background to the paper. It offers explanations as to how Britain's failure to keep pace with developments in military theory and technology throughout the inter-war years resulted in it lacking adequate weaponry and battlefield tactics to confront the German offensive of 1940. The following chapter deals with the aftermath of the loss of France as an ally and the threat Britain faced from German invasion after its forces had evacuated from the Continent. It also discusses the course of action Britain formulated for continuing the war and the challenges this decision presented through until the entry of the US into the war at the close of 1941. Chapter 3 begins with the first Washington Summit and from this point onwards, the thesis examines Britain's policy under the shadow of the trans-Atlantic alliance and its perspective towards Operations Sledgehammer and Round-Up. The fourth chapter analyses the importance of the Casablanca Conference on Western Allied strategy along with the growing influence that the Soviet Union was beginning to assert on the US-British relationship and issue of the Second Front. The fifth and final chapter deals with the development to Britain's policy throughout 1943 and the changes that it underwent that year and the reasons why by the close of the Teheran Conference in November, operations such as Sledgehammer and Round-Up had manifested themselves into Overlord.

A variety of sources were utilised during this study, including the public speeches Churchill gave throughout the war⁵⁴, for example to the House of Commons and other public forums such as the Lord Mayor of London's Luncheon, the United States Congress and numerous other locations at which the Prime Minister spoke. The speeches cited in this study demonstrate that

⁵⁴ Robert Rhodes James. Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, Volumes 1-8. (New York, Chelsea House Publishers, 1974).

publicly, Churchill and his government were prepared to continue the war despite Germany's control over Western Europe but the usefulness of this material is limited. First, they do not offer any detailed analysis of British strategy and second, one could interpret them as propaganda and merely an effort on the part of the Churchill Government to strengthen public morale. Consequently, the research concentrated on information sourced from British government records⁵⁵, the correspondence between Churchill and Roosevelt⁵⁶ and Brooke's diaries.⁵⁷ This data allowed for a study of detailed British policy that illustrated the divergences of opinion not only with the United States but also the cleavages that emerged within the British Government and military hierarchy itself concerning the opening of the Second Front and their preferences as to the course of Allied strategy.

⁵⁵ PREM 3: Papers Concerning Defence and Operational Subjects, 1940-1945, Winston Churchill, Ministry of Defence, Secretariat Papers, Public Records Office, London.

⁵⁶ Warren F. Kimball. Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence, Volumes 1-3. (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁵⁷ Field Marshal/Lord Alanbrooke. War Diaries, 1939-1946. Edited by Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman. (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001).

CHAPTER ONE.

The Inter-War Years: New Tactics, Old Policies and the effect on British Military Capability.

"The immediate chain of causation is to be traced through Sir Henry Wilson's pre-war affiliations, Lord Kitchener's summons to arms, the General Staff's haste to reach France, and General Joffe's haste to reach Germany, down to its ultimate destination in the swamps of Passchendaele Thither we guided and there we spent the strength of England, pouring it out with whole-hearted abandon on the soil of our allies".

Liddell Hart's explanation as to the factors that led Britain to deploy its army to Europe in the First World War.

1918-1940: New Ways in Warfare.

If June 1940 was Britain's 'finest hour', then the months between November 1918 and June 1919 should also have been remembered as 'fine hours' but this was not the case. The Armistice on the Western Front meant that although the military balance in Europe had swung back in the Allies' favour, four years of conflict had exhausted their fighting spirit and their financial resources. Howard claims that the "victory was too ambiguous"⁵⁸ while Perret describes the First World War as a "People's War and the suffering inflicted was written large on memorials in even the smallest villages of the land".⁵⁹ The conscription of civilians into the armed forces and the high casualty rate among the units in the front line meant the war affected people at all different levels and sectors of society. Throughout the 1920's the civilian population gradually learnt more of the horrors of the war in a way that it never had before. Mourning and the epitaph of 'Never Again' overlay feelings of celebration and conquest.

Lloyd George may have promised a land fit for heroes but in the years immediately after the truce, his Administration was in no position to keep true

⁵⁸ Michael Howard. *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars.* (Middlesex, England, Penguin Books Limited, 1972), 74.

to this pledge. Laybourn writes that, “by the end of the war, in 1918, Britain had lost the industrial leadership that she had previously enjoyed. Even as British industries recovered in the early 1920’s, it was soon evident that they had lost about one-fifth of their old markets”.⁶⁰ The demobilisation of the war economy coincided with the return of four million men into civilian life and the massive conscript army had given way to a skeleton force deployed on policing duties throughout the Empire and the overseas spheres of influence. There was a brief upturn in Britain’s economic fortunes after the war as the “great demand for goods to replace depleted stocks and considerable demand for capital to restore peacetime production provided a stimulus to business”.⁶¹ Yet by 1920, the economic forecast for Britain had changed. Supply had caught up with demand and the European markets began to face stiff competition from American and Asian producers. Britain’s share of world trade had been diminishing since the late 1880’s and the First World War accelerated this process. As a result, unemployment, the National Debt and inflation began to rise.

In an effort to counter this depression, the Government’s policy was to cut the budgets for all its departments and the falling fiscal axe affected defence. In 1920, the defence budget halved from £604 000,000 to £292 000,000 and within a year that figure halved again.⁶² This retrenchment in defence spending was in line with Churchill’s proposal to the Cabinet in 1919 that it adopt the ‘Ten Year Rule’ under which British military expenditure and planning was tailored to the assumption that there would be no major conflict or need for a commitment of forces to the Continent within that period. On face value, this view was sound. Germany’s military and economic power lay crushed under the Treaty of Versailles and the French Army stood as the largest and most powerful in Europe. Britain had subscribed to the League of Nations as a system of collective security that would maintain the post-war balance of power; hence, the epitaph of ‘Never Again’ rang throughout Government policy as well as being the public’s sentiment.

⁵⁹ Bryan Perret. *History of Blitzkrieg*. (London, Panther, 1985), 55.

⁶⁰ Keith Laybourn. *Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History of Britain Between the Wars*. (Gloucester, A. Sutton, 1990), 8.

⁶¹ Alfred F. Havighurst. *Twentieth Century Britain: Second Edition*. (New York, Harper and Row, 1962), 161.

Perret writes that the belief that Britain would not be faced with another Continental war and the financial retrenchment “ensured not only the contradiction of armies but also that military spending was constrained by a financial strait jacket which prohibited all but the simplest experiments with new weapons systems and techniques”.⁶³ Nevertheless, there was a small chorus of theorists, in Britain and elsewhere, who studied the mechanisation of warfare and looked beyond what they had witnessed of this process during the Great War to the wars in the future. Thinkers such as Douhet, Mitchell, Fuller, Guderian and Liddell Hart “realised that the primitive fighting vehicles and aircraft of 1918 would inevitably give place to more sophisticated machines with greater mechanical endurance and destructive capability. Each of these strands confirmed in some measure that the next major war would be one of mobility. Woven together they would form the fabric of a technique designed to save life by achieving a lightning victory - the technique of *Blitzkrieg*”.⁶⁴

Liddell Hart and Fuller emerged as Britain’s pre-eminent military theorists during the inter-war years and each was at the forefront of the campaign to mechanise the Army and re-develop its tactics on the battlefield. Fuller had ended the war with the rank of Major General and by 1918 was the Commanding Officer of the Royal Tank Corps. He continued to campaign for the increased mechanisation of the British Army that began tentatively with the creation of the Experimental Armoured Force in 1927. The purpose of this force was to demonstrate the effect that the combined firepower of tanks, armoured vehicles, motorised infantry and close support aircraft could have on the battlefield. In spite of his rank and position within the Army Fuller was passed over for command of this formation and he resigned his commission in 1933 when he was offered the post of military commander in Bombay which he considered a demotion.

Nevertheless, the military continued to develop Fuller’s ideas and in 1931, a Tank Brigade was established and was equipped with medium size tanks and radios that for the first time allowed an armoured battle group to operate

⁶² Howard, 78.

⁶³ Perret, 55.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

with a degree of flexibility unrivalled by any other army at that time. Field Commanders could make decisions depending on battlefield conditions and the formation could fight outside of the tactics set down in the pre-battle briefing. Hence, Britain was leading the way in mechanised warfare but it would not be long before other nations closed the gap. European thinkers, most notably Guderian, closely examined Fuller's work and adapted it into their own line of study and given Guderian's rise in the command structure of the German Army in the 1930's it is not surprising that Fuller's influence showed in the German offensives of 1939 and 1940. Barnett writes that "in many ways Fuller predicted the general pattern of the German victories over Poland in 1939 and France in 1940, and even more closely the pattern of the campaign in the Western Desert in 1940-43".⁶⁵ Fuller prophesied that the war of the future would not be anything like that he witnessed in 1914-1918. Smaller, better-equipped mechanised forces would advance with speed and depth replacing the vast immobile conscript armies. He forecast that the tank would be the principal weapon within these forces and that it would work in close collaboration with aircraft but it was not until 1938 that the British Army finally moved away from the view that the tank was merely an infantry support weapon and established its first armoured division.

By 1925, Liddell Hart had become the leading military writer in Britain through his position as military affairs correspondent for London's *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. Liddell Hart had served as an infantryman during the First World War and suffered wounds at the Somme. Having been withdrawn from frontline duty, his role throughout the remainder of his service was to analyse the British Army's training methods. Liddell Hart was influenced by the tactics employed by Ludendorff's shock troops in their offensive of 1918 where, rather than smash their forces against the heavily defended Allied line, the Germans switched the point of their attack to the weakest part of the enemy position to create a breach. The reserves would then be able to infiltrate the line and span out among the rear areas of the Allied sectors. He labelled this tactic the 'expanding torrent'.

⁶⁵ Corelli Barnett. *Britain and Her Army: 1509 - 1970*. (London, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), 413.

It is possible that as an infantryman Liddell Hart was still haunted by his experiences during the Great War as throughout his career as a writer he continued to advocate a defensive strategy for the British forces while remaining critical of the European powers for their faith in human mass. He wrote that the desire to build the massive armies of the Great War stemmed from the perception that the Prussian victory of 1870 was due to the human size of their armies and that the writings of Clausewitz had reinforced this belief. According to Liddell Hart "the consequences, the threefold consequences, were to make war more difficult to avoid, more difficult to conduct successfully, and more difficult to terminate save by sheer exhaustion".⁶⁶ Liddell Hart claimed that the British only began to understand the value of the armoured vehicle in 1917 at the Battle of Cambrai⁶⁷ in which the British employed artillery in conjunction with armoured fighting vehicles and this not only reduced the exposure of soldiers to enemy fire but also reintroduced the element of surprise back into the attack. Technology, which until this point had strengthened the defence, gave the advantage to those on the offensive. The British had begun experimenting with tanks as early as 1915 when Haig⁶⁸ had pressed for tanks for the front in large numbers for the offensive of 1916 but design and technical difficulties prevented this from occurring. The Allied commanders dispersed the few vehicles that arrived in service throughout the British divisions and used them to give supporting fire for the ground troops. Had they been concentrated into a single attacking component and concentrated on a short area of the German line then the Allies might have achieved the breakthrough that eluded them.

In his articles for *The Times* in 1937 and his 1939 book, *The Defence of Britain*, Liddell Hart argued that Britain should adopt a policy of 'limited

⁶⁶ B.H. Liddell Hart. *The Defence of Britain*. (London, Faber and Faber Limited, 1939), 9.

⁶⁷ The Battle of Cambrai commenced on 20 November, 1917. It marked the first time that tanks had been used en masse in an offensive and the Royal Tank Corp's entire complement of 350 tanks were deployed.

⁶⁸ Douglas Haig, 1st Earl, 1861-1928, served in the Sudan in 1898 and in South Africa between 1899 and 1902. He was appointed Commanding Officer of the British 1st Army Corps in 1914 and was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Expeditionary Force the following year. In 1916, he mounted the ill-fated Somme offensive and in November 1917 with British forces now under French command, he conducted the Passchendaele campaign. Although joint British and French command was not established until 1918, Haig has been severely criticised for the heavy casualty toll among his forces and the lack of gains on the battlefields.

liability'. Under this strategy, Britain would fall back on its traditional strategy of naval blockade and economic warfare. This policy of economic strangulation would be assisted by "two supplementary arms: one financial, which embraced the subsidising and military provisioning of allies; the other military, which embraced the dispatch of small expeditionary forces to strike at the enemy's vulnerable extremities or to cement any promising collection of allied forces".⁶⁹ Liddell Hart was adamant that Britain hold back the newly formed armoured divisions from the Continent and arrange them and others into a strategic reserve. He was concerned that once British forces deployed to France their numbers would increase and so too would the casualty lists. Liddell Hart believed that even if the Germans broke through the Maginot Line the mobile formations in reserve would be sufficient to plug any breach of France's defensive screen.

The First World War not only heralded the arrival of the tank onto the battlefield but also the aircraft. Smith claims that British interest in the aircraft as a military device began in 1909 with Bleriot's journey across the Channel.⁷⁰ He writes that 'the military implications of Bleriot's flight were, of course, ominous for a country which traditionally relied on the inviolability of the Channel for its security. In the late nineteenth century, invasion scares were common in Britain whenever the French or Germans stole a march on the Royal Navy in technical development. Something of a similar nature followed Bleriot's flight'.⁷¹ For the first two years of the war, the aircraft were primarily deployed in reconnaissance duties and photographing the enemy positions. However, by 1916, the role of the Royal Flying Corps and its counterparts within other forces had evolved to provide close support for the infantry. That same year, British planes bombed the industrial regions of western Germany. The age of heavy bombing of cities and civilian areas had begun.

The German raids on London and the southern coastal areas of England in 1916 and 1917 were the defining points in the development in air power

He was made an earl in 1919 and he spent his post-war years working on behalf of the British Legion and disabled servicemen.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* 44.

⁷⁰ Louis Bleriot crossed the English Channel in a Bleriot XI monoplane on 25 July, 1919. He took off from Les Baraques, near Calais at 4.41 a.m. and landed at 5.17 a.m. in Dover. His flight covered 24 miles (38.6 kms).

during the Great War. If Bleriot's flight had been an ominous sign that the Channel could not protect the British people from the effects of war then the Zeppelin and bomber raids of 1916-17 provided conclusive proof. The psychological effects of the raids were perhaps more damaging to the British morale and their faith in their geographical isolation than the physical cost. In order to combat the raids, 17,000 troops had to be committed to the air defence of the Home Islands.⁷² The bombing raids over southern England and western Germany ushered in a facet of warfare whereby the air was now a part of the battleground as well as the land and sea. In 1921 Douhet warned: "no longer can areas exist in which life can be lived in safety and tranquillity, nor can the battlefield any longer be limited to actual combatants. On the contrary, the battlefield will be limited only by the boundaries of the nations at war, and all of their citizens will become combatants, since all of them will be exposed to the aerial offensives of the enemy. There will be no distinction any longer between soldiers and civilians".⁷³

Douhet was adamant that to prove decisive in warfare, aerial offensives must target "peacetime and commercial establishments; important buildings, private and public; transportation arteries and centres and certain designated areas of civilian population".⁷⁴ In other words, if an air offensive was to achieve victory then it must be directed at a country's infrastructure and economy and prevent material and equipment from being supplied to the forces at the frontline. Given that the objective of an air force was the destruction of industrial areas away from the battlefield, civilian morale would be shattered and the industrial output would halt. However, this apocalyptic vision did not prove to be the case in the Second World War. The Luftwaffe offensive on the British cities did not shatter the population's morale and despite the damage these raids inflicted, British war industry was still able to produce the necessary materials to continue the war. Nevertheless, Douhet was closer to the mark with his claim that "to be defeated in the air, on the other hand, is finally to be defeated and to be at the mercy of the enemy, with

⁷¹ Malcolm Smith. *British Air Strategy Between the Wars*. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1984), 15.

⁷² *ibid.* 17.

⁷³ Giulio Douhet. *The Command of the Air*. (New Hampshire, Ayer Company Publishers Inc., 1984), 9-10.

no chance of defending oneself, compelled to accept whatever terms he sees fit to dictate".⁷⁵ The Luftwaffe's inability to defeat the Royal Air Force following the withdrawal from Dunkirk prevented the launching of Operation Sealion, thus throwing Britain a lifeline in its efforts to continue in the conflict.

The destructive potential of the aircraft and the possibility that it could play a decisive role in future warfare impressed Mitchell as it had Douhet and he was intrigued by the affect that aircraft would have on a civilian population during wartime. Yet Mitchell's work was also concerned with the impact the aircraft could have on an enemy's forces on the battlefield, especially at sea. According to Warner, "the ability of aircraft to obliterate every sort of surface vessel, leaving surface vessels no military function whatever, became a veritable article of faith with Mitchell".⁷⁶ In 1921, planes from the US Army Air Corps staged a mock attack against the ex-German battleship *Ostfriesland*,⁷⁷ "giving the first actual demonstration that gravity-propelled bombs could easily send a heavily armoured to the bottom".⁷⁸ The demonstration was a portent of things to come, yet Mitchell struggled to persuade a conservative military establishment of the validity of his theories. His arguments and efforts to establish an independent air force in the United States ran into opposition from the navy and army and his zeal for his cause would cost him his commission and military career in 1926.⁷⁹

While Fuller, Douhet and Mitchell may have struggled to impress their ideas onto their indifferent military establishments, a logistics officer serving

⁷⁴ Ibid. 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 23.

⁷⁶ Edward Warner. 'Douhet, Mitchell, Seversky: Theories of Air Warfare'. Edward Mead Earle edited. *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*. (New York, Atheneum, 1966) 485.

⁷⁷ The German battleship SMS *Ostfriesland* was launched in September 1909 and commissioned into the *Kaiserliche Marine* (Imperial German Navy) in May 1911. Having surrendered to the Allies following the First World War, the ship was commissioned as a United States Navy vessel on 7 April 1920 but was decommissioned in September that same year. *Ostfriesland*, along with several other ex-German vessels were used as targets by Navy aircraft as part of Mitchell's demonstration of air power/

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Mitchell's military career began in 1898 when he enlisted in the infantry. Having learnt to fly in 1916, he was sent to Europe a year later as an observer and finished the war as commander of the air service operations. As a Brigadier-General, Mitchell advocated the establishment of an air force that was separate from the army or the navy and he accused both services of incompetence and criminal negligence on matters of aeronautics. His actions led to him being court-martialled in 1925 and his rank was suspended for five years. Mitchell resigned from the army on 1 February 1926 and devoted his time thereafter to lecturing, writing and petitioning the US Government for a separate and unified air force. Ibid. 485-503.

with Germany's post-war *Reichswehr* was proving to be a keen student of mechanised warfare. As a cavalry officer on the Western Front, Guderian had nurtured the idea that mobility and the transfer of large numbers of men and equipment through difficult terrain would bring victory in future battles. Although he did not serve at Cambrai, the battle had left a lasting impression on him. Macksey writes that, "Guderian was to rate the moment when "the tank force provided the real dynamic punch (*stosskraft*) of the Entente armies since they broke through the Siegfried (Hindenburg) Line, regarded as impenetrable at Cambrai, in one morning".⁸⁰ The British success was short-lived yet the battle demonstrated that when tanks were massed together in a single formation they had the capability to overcome heavily fortified infantry positions and allow an attacking force increased mobility and speed as well as firepower.

The defeat in 1918 and the Treaty of Versailles had not extinguished the belief within the German Army nor Guderian's thinking that the *Reichswehr* must remain a forward-looking institution with a view towards future developments. Although restricted to 100,000 men, Seeckt⁸¹ saw the need to lay the foundations for future expansion and mechanisation and the Germans began to undertake clandestine research into airpower and mechanised warfare with Soviet Russia throughout the 1920's and early 1930's. Throughout this period, Guderian served with the Transport Inspectorate and for the next ten years from 1922, he set himself the task of developing his theories through a series of articles in military publications in which mobility and *stosskraft* remained central to his thinking. Guderian believed that the key to winning a battle lay in the delivery of firepower close to enemy positions at short range. Armour was strong enough to protect against a rifle bullet and the infantryman could not carry it around as part of his kit. Large-scale infantry formations did not possess the mobility and speed required to overcome

⁸⁰ Macksey. 18.

⁸¹ Hans von Seeckt, 1866-1936, was appointed Chief of the *Reichswehr* following the close of the First World War having fought in Poland, Serbia, Romania and Turkey. Seeckt concluded the clause in the Treaty of Rapallo through which the German forces obtained weapons and training in the Soviet Union. He commanded the army until 1926 and then embarked upon a political career and became a deputy in the Reichstag with the conservative People's Party. In 1934 he became a military advisor to Chiang Kai-Shek until his death in 1936.

heavily fortified and static defences and their small arms could only deliver a limited *Stosskraft*. Guderian's solution was the tank.⁸²

In 1928, the *Reichswehr* High Command appointed Guderian to command a new branch of the Transport Corps. This department studied the use of tanks in warfare and their integration with other branches of the armed forces. The *Reichswehr* had already embarked upon a covert developmental programme with Russia under the terms of the Treaty of Rapallo⁸³ and a year later Guderian travelled to Sweden to witness exercises by Swedish armoured formations. From this point onwards, he realised the potential of the tank not just as an infantry support device, as was the view of the French and the British, but as part of an armoured division that had been a fundamental element of Fuller's teachings. These new divisions would consist of artillery, armoured cars and mechanised infantry that formed a fast moving, powerful weapon that once it breached the weakness in an enemy defence could rapidly move throughout the rear areas.

Guderian had the opportunity to demonstrate his ideas before Hitler in 1934, three years after his appointment to the Inspectorate of Motorised Troops. His ideas fitted neatly into Hitler's plans for re-armament and territorial expansion despite protests from commanders such as Beck⁸⁴ who refused to view the tank as anything other than an infantry support weapon. Hitler recognised the usefulness of the tank and armoured vehicle because Germany could not sustain a protracted war but there was also the

⁸² Guderian never experienced a battle during the First World War where the tank was employed. He was not at the Somme when the British first deployed tanks on 15 September, 1916, nor was he at Cambrai when a massed formation broke through the German lines. According to Macksey, such actions left an indelible mark on the young officer serving at Army Group C's headquarters. Macksey also writes that Guderian claimed to be aware of such actions and the tank battles of 1918 yet he did not actively begin his study into the use of tanks in battle until his posting to the Inspectorate of Transport Troops in 1922 and then to the Inspectorate of Motorised Troops in 1931. These units became the forerunners of the *panzerwaffe* that the German armed forces developed in the 1930's. For further discussion on Guderian and his theories of armoured warfare, see Macksey, 37-79.

⁸³ The Treaty of Rapallo was signed on 16 April 1922 between the Weimar Government and the Bolshevik Russia. Under the terms of this agreement, the two countries renounced all territorial and financial claims against each other. They also agreed to increase economic co-operation. A secret annex was signed on 29 July that permitted Germany to train their military inside the Soviet Union, thus violating the Treaty of Versailles.

⁸⁴ Ludwig Beck, 1880-1944, served on the General Staff in the First World War and throughout the inter-war period. He opposed Hitler's expansionist plans and he resigned in protest against the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938. He became an opponent of Hitler's government and was a conspirator in the bomb plot to assassinate the Fuehrer on 20 July, 1944. In the aftermath of the failed attempt, he was arrested and shot.

propaganda value of such a force. It increased Germany's prestige and inspired fear, especially among Germany's eastern neighbours and the other European powers. In 1935, the Panzer Command was established and three divisions were immediately formed that were equipped with various size tanks over the next four years.

In 1936, Guderian published *Achtung! Panzer* in which he detailed his vision for armoured warfare in what was a blueprint for the panzer actions in the years to come. He proposed that the deployment of the tank in large numbers against the enemy's flanks and rear and conceded that the tank alone was not sufficient to hold captured enemy territory and that the panzer divisions needed to include motorised infantry and artillery for this purpose. Guderian argued that the purpose of the armoured divisions was to achieve a quick and decisive breakthrough and that the tanks be concentrated at the central point in an attack. If this occurred and the tanks delivered an effective punch then their mobility and speed could deny the enemy the time needed to mobilise his defences. Although Guderian set his own ideas and Germany's future war plans down in writing, such a warning went unheeded in London, Paris and elsewhere yet these tactics proved decisive in the battle for Western Europe four years later.

Prelude to 1940: Britain's Unlimited Liability.

Despite the terms of Versailles and the sentiment of 'Never Again' of 1918-19, it would only be a matter of time before Britain was once again embroiled in European affairs as Versailles delivered a peace that was born with a hole through its heart. Setting the terms pressed upon Germany aside, its wording was to prove its undoing especially Part V of the Treaty that would open the door to problems in the disarmament process in the years to follow. It was under the preamble to Part V that Germany argued that it should be accorded international equal rights with the other powers at the conferences of the 1920's and 1930's. Richardson and Kitching claim that "to make the relevant clauses more palatable to Germany, it was stated in the preamble to Part V of the treaty that the arms reductions required were also intended "to

render possible the initiation of a general limitation of armaments to all nations".⁸⁵ Under this section, Germany argued that the other powers also had a moral and legal obligation to reduce their military capacities.

The Allies did not share this viewpoint. The basis for their disarmament programmes lay in Article 8 of the treaty that stated that a country's disarmament programme must be consistent with its national security. The sense of ambiguity imbued within this argument enabled the Allies to maintain their military dominance over Germany. Richardson and Kitching write that, "if, in terms of legal obligation, it was Article 8 of the Covenant that the discussions for a general disarmament convention devolved, in practice the impulsion behind the negotiations was the potential threat of Germany to the security system established by the Treaty of Versailles".⁸⁶ However, the threat of German rearmament and ambition cast a long shadow over Europe even after the events of 1918 and 1919. France, never able to erase this insecurity, entered into security arrangements with Romania, Poland and Czechoslovakia, and constructed a series of fortifications on its border with Germany that would become infamous as the Maginot Line. The refusal of the US Congress to ratify the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations and Russian support to communist movements throughout Europe meant that Britain remained France's main ally in the face of a potential German threat.

The awakening to this threat came on 14 October 1933 when the German Government gave notice to its representative that it planned to withdraw from the Disarmament Conference.⁸⁷ The conference was supposed to be the crowning achievement for those who had searched for a policy of international

⁸⁵ Dick Richardson and Carolyn Kitching. 'Britain and the World Disarmament Conference'. Peter Catterall with C.J. Morris. *Britain and the Threat to Stability in Europe, 1918-45*. (London, Leicester University Press, 1993), 36

⁸⁶ *ibid.* 37

⁸⁷ The term 'Disarmament Conference' denotes a series of discussions attended by those countries in the League of Nations along with the United States and Soviet Union from 1932 until 1937. In 1925, the League established a commission tasked with establishing which arms would be limited and how the member states could achieve this. By 1931, the commission had established an agreement and it delivered these findings to the Disarmament Conference when it opened in 1932. From its outset, disagreement over what constituted war materials and France's reluctance to reduce its military capacity due to fears over German rearmament hindered the conference. Germany claimed that if other states did not reduce their military strength and reach of a level of parity with its own armed forces, then it would rebuild its military power. The conference adjourned from June until October 1933, however when it re-convened, the National Socialists had taken control of Germany's government and

disarmament. However, it had finally halted under the strain of German demands for armaments parity with its European neighbours, French suspicions and fear of invasion and Japanese aggression throughout northern and western China. The German withdrawal from the Conference marked the first time the Government had countered the post-war treaties. It was Hitler's first diplomatic victory and one that led to a policy of re-armament in defiance of Versailles and territorial expansion.

By 1936, the British Empire faced not only a threat from a resurgent Germany but also from possible adversaries within the Mediterranean Sea and the Far East. Japan had been a British ally during the Great War but, by 1931, this relationship had come under increasing strain due to Japan's imperial aspirations. In that year, Japan refused to comply with a League of Nations' demand for the withdrawal of its forces stationed in Manchuria and by 1937, its war of conquest had extended throughout northern and western China. This offensive threatened the British Far Eastern Empire along with Australia and New Zealand whose defence fell heavily upon the Royal Navy. The Navy would be required to deploy forces to those waters should a threat arise and the Singapore base was constructed in 1921 as a central point for from which it could operate. Yet the question remained as to whether the Navy had the ships available to send. Any deployment to that region would come at the expense of its strength elsewhere for example, the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore Imperial defence hinged on there not being a threat to British interests in one or more regions simultaneously.

Britain proved to be a weak ally in the face of Axis re-armament and Germany's re-occupation of the Rhineland. Germany justified these actions by claiming it was in response to the Franco-Russian agreement of February of 1936 and that this released Germany from its obligations under the Locarno Treaty.⁸⁸ Whatever Hitler's justification, the action violated Article 44 of the Treaty of Versailles and could have provided France with its own pretext for

announced that Germany would be leaving the conference to pursue a re-armament programme. The conference continued to meet sporadically until 1 May 1937.

⁸⁸ The Locarno Treaty was signed by the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Under the terms of the agreement, Germany, France and Belgium accepted the boundaries of their shared borders, while Italy and Britain agreed to ensure that they maintained this pact. Under the terms, Germany joined the League of Nations yet no provision or agreement was reached concerning Germany's eastern frontiers.

launching a counter attack. Yet the Allies did nothing. First, there was a sense of feeling, especially within Britain, that Germany was simply reclaiming its own territory and redressing the terms of a harsh treaty with which there was little sympathy. Second, France was not prepared to act without British support that was not forthcoming. British foreign policy throughout the latter half of the 1930's was under the increasing influence of Halifax and Chamberlain and moved towards compromise and negotiation rather than sanctions and military action.

Germany's violation of the 1938 Munich Agreement meant that France's system of alliances with the Eastern states became redundant. If war broke out in Central or Eastern Europe then France and the Low Countries would face the power of an expanded Reich alone and this situation became more serious due to the surrender of the Czech Army and military establishment. Yet Britain was unprepared for conflict in Europe. Although the RAF was expanding its number of squadrons, it was primarily a bomber force with Fighter Command tasked with protecting the home islands against Luftwaffe intrusion. Unlike the Germans, the British had not integrated their fighters into a combined role with the forces on the ground and they were not equipped with dive-bombing formations. For its part, the Army could only muster four regular infantry divisions for deployment to the Continent, although this total expanded to nine in 1939 with the re-introduction of conscription. The newly formed armoured units were beset by technical difficulties and debate within the military and political establishment over the size and the cost of the tanks for the Army. Barnett claims that this indecision was due to the lack of a clear strategic and tactical doctrine that lay somewhere between the ideas proposed by Fuller and Liddell Hart and the orthodoxy that had carried the day in 1917-1918. Hence, the British designed their tanks according to two specifications. The first was the heavy tank that was slow moving and designed once again as an infantry support vehicle while those vehicles designed to engage the panzers were lightly armed and small. The cost of these decisions would become apparent with the outbreak of war and Barnett writes that it was not until 1943 that the British were able to strike the correct balance in their armoured design.

1940: The Consequence of Inaction.

The inability of the Allies to match the German in the battle of Western Europe in 1940 was due in “part to indecision and dithering over specifications; part to technical incompetence of some British engineering firms; part to pre-war Treasury meanness”.⁸⁹ However, the outbreak of the Second World War, the Allies again placed their faith in large, static defensive formations and believed that their own economic strength could be mobilised to overcome that of Germany and that blockade and sanctions would cripple German industry and inflow of raw materials. As with his predecessors in 1914, Gamelin⁹⁰ expected the main thrust of the German attack to come from the north and deployed the bulk of his forces to the River Dyle believing that the Maginot Line would counter any direct assault across the Rhine and that the terrain of the Ardennes would prove impassable. The French Char-B tank carried as much armour and firepower as the Panzer yet the Allies dispersed their tank formations throughout the divisions rather than having them concentrated into a single formation. The error that had proved so costly in 1916 proved to be the most decisive in the campaign of 1940.

The British and French faced a military campaign that was innovative rather than revolutionary. The weaponry may have had increased lethality than ever before but the campaign did not produce any new armament that would alter the course of warfare forever. Instead, the success of ‘Fall Gelb’ lay in manner in which the Germans deployed their men and equipment along with exploiting the flaws in the Allied planning. The original plan designed by Brauchitsch⁹¹ and Halder⁹² proposed a push through the Low Countries in a

⁸⁹ Barnett. 421.

⁹⁰ Maurice Gustave Gamelin, 1872-1958, served on General Joffe's staff during the First World War, and became chief of the General Staff in 1931 and became Chief of Staff National Defence in 1938. At the outbreak of war in 1939, Gamelin's strategy rested upon the fortifications of the Maginot Line and the Strategic Reserve. However, these proved ineffective against the *blitzkrieg*. On 19 May 1940, Gamelin was replaced by General Maxime Weygand and was arrested by the Vichy Government upon its seizure of power. Gamelin was imprisoned in Germany until his release from captivity in 1945.

⁹¹ Heinrich Brauchitsch, 1881-1948. Having reached the rank of major at the end of the First World War, Brauchitsch was promoted Major-General and Inspector of Artillery in 1932 becoming General of Artillery in 1937. He was promoted to the position of Commander in Chief of the German Army in February 1938 and was one of twelve men promoted to Field Marshal by Hitler following the invasion of France. Hitler relieved him of his duties in

move that would outflank the Maginot Line. Under their original submission that was similar to the Schlieffen Plan of 1914, the main thrust would be to the north of the Ardennes towards the Dutch-Belgian border with the forces to the south providing a protective screen along the left flank with the objective of reaching the River Meuse. The plan did not find favour with other officers serving on the General Staff and nor with the Fuehrer himself. Macksey writes that Manstein⁹³, "complained that it was unlikely to achieve complete victory since it could not bring about the total destruction of the enemy's northern wing and failed to create a favourable strategic situation from which to launch subsidiary thrusts: in essence lacked penetration and versatility".⁹⁴ Manstein argued that if the German forces could not achieve a swift breakthrough then Germany would experience a long, drawn out conflict that it could not afford.

His own plan differed from the proposal forwarded by Brauchitsch and Halder on one crucial point. Rather than embracing a full swing through the Low Countries and smashing directly into the Allied northern armies, the main German thrust would be concentrated in the Ardennes towards the French town of Sedan. The push from Army Group B into Holland and Belgium would serve as a diversion and by drawing the Allies north towards Brussels and Antwerp, the Germans would be able to expose the weaker Allied right flank. Once a breakthrough came, the offensive would turn northwards towards Amiens and the Channel in a move designed to attack the rear areas of the

December 1941, with the failure of Operation Barbarossa to defeat the Soviet Union and he was arrested by the British in 1945. He died in 1948 while awaiting trial by a British military court as a war criminal.

⁹² Franz Halder, 1884-1972, served as a member of staff of the Crown Prince of Bavaria during the First World War. He became Chief of General Staff in 1938 and devised the invasion of Poland and he helped plan Operation's Sealion and Barbarossa. Halder replaced Brauchitsch as Commander in Chief of the Germany Army in 1941 but was replaced a year later after a disagreement with Hitler. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944 on suspicion of being a conspirator in the July bomb plot and having been sent to the Dachau concentration camp was freed by American units in 1945. He gave evidence for the prosecution at the Nuremburg Trials and died in 1972.

⁹³ Erich von Manstein, 1887-1973, became the Chief of Operations for the German Army in 1936. Having served as commander of Army Group South during the attack on Poland, he returned to Berlin where he devised the offensive against France including the push through the Ardennes. This became known as the 'Manstein Plan'. Between 1941 and 1944, Manstein led a series of offensives throughout the Soviet Union including the capture of the Crimea and the failed attempt to rescue the Seventh Army from Stalingrad and the re-capture of Karkov. In 1944, he was dismissed from office for quarrelling with Hitler and when arrested after the war, he was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment for genocide. He was released in 1953 due to ill health and he died in Germany in 1973.

⁹⁴ Kenneth Macksey. *Guderian: Panzer General*. (London, Macdonald and James, 1975), 97.

Allied forces positioned along the River Dyle. The result was that "Hitler's much-cherished surprise element would be fully gratified, for Manstein's plan called, not for eliminating France at a stroke, but for a swift advance to the Channel coast that would cut the Allies in half".⁹⁵ It was at this point that Guderian entered the equation with his proposal to the General Staff that the panzer divisions lead the attack through the Ardennes. The senior officers, including Brauchitsch, Halder and Rundstedt⁹⁶ argued that the infantry, traditionally the armed forces' principal weapon on the battlefield, would be required to carry out the river crossings and create the bridgeheads. Yet Hitler, enthused with the use of tanks and armour, overruled their concerns and accepted the Sichelschnitt Plan along with the use of an armoured spearhead during a meeting with Manstein on 17 February.

With the bulk of the Allied forces deployed along the Franco-Belgian border only the French Second Army, based in the Ardennes, was in a position to confront the massed panzers of Army Group A and the powerful 88mm anti-aircraft guns that the Germans used in a ground role as its troops were heavily bombarded from the air. The extensive use of heavy and dive-bomber formations meant that the Germans did not have to deploy a large number of heavy artillery batteries through the narrow mountain passes along with the voluminous supply and ammunition columns. Once the Germans had broken out of their Meuse bridgeheads and pushed into central France, the Allied armies found themselves fighting on two fronts and having to secure their flanks and rear in an effort not to have their armies cut in half. In a desperate

⁹⁵ Richard Collier. *1940: The Avalanche*. (New York, The Dial Press/James Wade, 1979), 68-69.

⁹⁶ Gerd von Rundstedt, 1875– 1953, ended the First World War with the rank of Major and by 1932 was promoted commander of the 3rd Infantry Division. Rundstedt resigned from the army in 1938 amidst his concern over growing Nazi power but was recalled in 1939 and served in Poland. Rundstedt supported Manstein's plan and led the German forces into France yet his call for a conventional assault on the British Expeditionary Force with infantry as the main weapon was accepted by Hitler and as a consequence, the panzers were ordered to halt before reaching Dunkirk. Rundstedt was promoted Field Marshal in 1941 and took part in the invasion of the Soviet Union. However, Hitler blamed him for the failure of Army Group South to hold the city of Rostov and he was relieved of his command. In 1942, he was sent to France to oversee the building of the Atlantic Wall yet his call for Hitler to negotiate with the Allies following the Normandy landings led again to his sacking. He was captured by the Americans in May 1945 but suffered a heart attack while under interrogation and served only 3 years in prison. Upon his release, he returned to Germany and died in February 1953.

act to save his government, Reynaud⁹⁷ bestowed command of the hastily organised Fourth Armoured Division onto de Gaulle on 15 May with orders to counter attack near the town of Crecy. This effort was in vain as was the counterattack by the French First Army on the 22nd because as their front crumbled, the Allied command was unable to organise its tank units into a formation powerful enough to confront the Germans. Even as de Gaulle led the last counterattack at Abbeville on 28 May, a separate peace lobby had formed within the Reynaud Government with Petain⁹⁸ and Weygand⁹⁹ at its core. Using the fear of internal disintegration, rumoured communist revolution and the argument that Britain had abandoned France, the peace lobby mobilised support for seeking terms with Germany at the expense of the beleaguered Reynaud, who despite appointing de Gaulle to his Cabinet as Secretary for Defence was increasingly isolated and unable to rally support for the continuation of hostilities. Once the Roosevelt Administration informed Reynaud that the United States would not enter the war on the Allied side his position was lost and on 14 June, he stepped aside in an act that allowed President Lebrun¹⁰⁰ to ask Petain to form a Government. Three days later de Gaulle escaped to London to form the National Committee of the Free French

⁹⁷ Paul Reynaud, 1878–1966. Entered the Chamber of Deputies in 1914 as an Independent and became Prime Minister in 1940. His resignation from office paved the way for the Petain Government to take power and the Vichy authorities arrested him in 1942. He was imprisoned in Germany until 1945 and upon his release re-entered politics in 1946. He died in 1966.

⁹⁸ Henri-Philippe Petain, 1856-1951, joined the French Army in 1876 and as an infantry officer became convinced that the development of modern weaponry aided the defensive over the offensive. In the First World War, Petain commanded the garrison at Verdun, becoming Commander in Chief of the army in 1917. He was promoted Field Marshal 2 weeks after the armistice and served as Minister for War in 1934. In 1940, he agreed to head the Vichy Government yet fled to Switzerland following the Normandy landings. He was arrested for treason in April 1945 and died in prison in 1950.

⁹⁹ Maxime Weygand, 1867-1946, was a career soldier who ended the First World War with the rank of Lieutenant-General. In 1920 he saw service in Poland against the Soviet Army and in 1930 he was appointed Governor of Syria. Following his retirement in 1935, he became active in right wing politics yet was recalled to the army in May 1940, replacing Gamelin as Allied Commander in Chief. He recommended that France enter into peace talks with the Germans on 13 June and briefly held the position of Minister of Defence under Petain before being ousted in a power struggle with Pierre Laval. Weygand retired from politics in 1942 yet he was arrested and tried as a collaborator in 1945. Although found guilty, he was granted leniency and he died in Paris in 1965.

¹⁰⁰ Albert Lebrun, 1871–1950, was elected to the French Parliament in 1900 with the Left Republican Party. He served as Minister of Colonies from 1911-14 and Liberated Regions from 1917 to 1919. He became President in 1932 and was re-elected to the position in 1939. On 13 July 1940, he resigned from office following the German offensive but was arrested by the Gestapo in 1943 on suspicion of being in contact with the resistance. After being deported to Austria, Hitler permitted him to return home in 1943. He died in France in 1950.

and on 21 June, the French delegation led by General Charles Huntziger¹⁰¹ arrived at the forest of Compiègne to begin the Armistice negotiations with Adolf Hitler and his senior military commanders. This was the final act in the Battle of France and the Wehrmacht now stood ready to continue through the Balkans and the Mediterranean in a triumphant march that would lead it into the Soviet Union. However, in the months following the conclusion of Germany's western campaign, its attention immediately shifted towards defeating Britain which having failed to learn the lessons of warfare that had developed throughout the inter-war years, faced the possibility of the Wehrmacht landing on its own shores.

¹⁰¹ Charles Leon Clement Huntziger, 1880-1941, headed the French Armistice Commission in 1940 before assuming the posts of Under-Secretary for War that same year before holding the Ministries of National Defence and War under the Vichy regime. He was killed in an air crash in 1941.

CHAPTER TWO.

June 1940 – December 1941: The Aftermath of Defeat.

'People sometimes wonder why we are unable to take the offensive against the enemy, and sometimes have to wait for some new blow which he will strike against us'.

Winston Churchill. "A Long Road to Tread". *Speech delivered at Mansion House, London. 9 November 1940.*

On 8 September 1940, Brooke wrote in his diary: "all reports still point to the probability of an invasion starting between 8th and 10th of this month. The responsibility of feeling what any mistakes or even misappreciations may mean in the future of these isles and of the Empire is a colossal one! and one which rather staggers me at times. I wish I had more adequately trained formations under my orders. But for the present there is nothing to be done but to trust God and pray for his help and guidance".¹⁰² His entry six days later echoed these sentiments as the Commander of the Home Forces dwelt not only on the prospects for Britain's survival but also on his concern over the deficiencies in his country's defence. Brooke recorded that the "suspense of waiting is very trying especially when one is so familiar with the weakness of our defence! Our exposed coastline is just twice the length of the front the French were holding in France with about 80 divisions and a Maginot Line! Here we have 22 divisions of which only about ½ can be looked upon as in any way fit for any form of mobile operation!"¹⁰³ The lifting of the Expeditionary Forces from the Continent may have kept Britain in the war but the damage to the Army in terms of its fighting capability was certainly grave, almost critical and according to Wilmot, "twenty-five tanks came back from France; 25 out of 704. Of the 400,000 men in the B.E.F. some 360,000 were saved, but only at a cost of sacrificing all their arms and equipment, except those weapons they carried home on their shoulders. For many weeks after the evacuations, as Churchill was to tell the House in Secret Session, "an invading force of 150,000 picked men might have created mortal havoc in our midst." During

¹⁰² Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke. *War Diaries, 1939-1946*. Edited by Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman. (London : Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001). 106.

¹⁰³ Ibid: 108.

those weeks, time was the most precious element in all Britain. At the end of June, the Order of Battle of the Home Forces showed 27 divisions and 14 independent brigades: a substantial army- on paper. Twelve of those divisions were trained and had tasted battle in France, but they were now virtually unarmed. The rest were equipped for training, but with four or five exceptions, were neither schooled nor armed for action. Some were just learning to shoot”¹⁰⁴.

Despite the threat from Sealion, the Churchill Government was adamant that Britain would continue the war but survival, let alone continued participation in the conflict, depended upon the outcome of the air battle that followed the Battle of France. The Royal Navy had suffered heavily in the ill-fated Norwegian campaign and again during its efforts to lift the Army from the French coast, paying the price for the Admiralty's pre-war blindness to the devastating impact aircraft can have on even the most heavily armed flotilla. The Navy was able to close the English Channel to enemy shipping and mustered what resources it possessed to deny the Germans superiority in the waters around the Continent and the sea-lanes into the Atlantic Ocean. However, it could not operate without the risk of serious loss while devoid of an effective air umbrella and as Wilmot claims: “for Britain, as for Germany, the outcome of the air battle was of supreme importance. While the Army was being trained and equipped, while the home defences were being organised and developed, while the Royal Navy was strengthening its destroyers, the task of holding the Wehrmacht off would fall first and foremost upon the R.A.F. If Britain could keep command of the air, her defences at sea and on land might never be put to the test of invasion; if not...”¹⁰⁵

Despite the numerical advantage the Luftwaffe held over the R.A.F., Goering had made two fatal errors that prevented it from inflicting defeat on its British adversary. The first error was the “failure of the Luftwaffe to appreciate the supreme importance of radar in the British system of interception”.¹⁰⁶ Wilmot claims that the Germans failed to realise that the British advances in radar far outstripped their own research and, although Goering was Director

¹⁰⁴ Chester Wilmot. *The Struggle for Europe*. (London, Collins, 1952). 33.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 34.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 44

of the Reich's Four Year Plan, he had failed to provide sufficient funds for the research and development in this technology. The second mistake was his acquiescence to Hitler's demand that the Luftwaffe concentrate on bombing the British cities following a British raid on Berlin. This switch in targeting proved to be the decisive point in the Battle of Britain as with its aerodromes and early warning installations no longer under sustained attack, Fighter Command gained time to rearm and regroup and assemble its reserves for battle. More important for the wider British war effort, the failure of the Germans in the air provided the Army with time to resurrect its fighting capability. Although the divisions protecting the southern coast of England were not at full strength, the British forces now had sufficient weaponry and equipment by September to pose a serious challenge to any seaborne invaders and the number of tanks in the Home Army's possession had risen to eight hundred. Although the Wehrmacht had completed its preparations for Sealion, it was unable to invade southern England without the Luftwaffe achieving air superiority over the Channel.

The British did not abandon the aspiration that their forces would re-deploy to the Continent at some future point in the war even though they recognised Germany's land-based military superiority. This point is raised by Butler, who claims "the prospect of a return in due time to the Continent for the final assault on Germany had been in the mind of the British high command ever since the summer of 1940, but so long as Britain stood alone against a triumphant Germany the prospect could only be remote".¹⁰⁷ Wilmot's examination draws a comparable conclusion and he explains that "the prospects at any particular time could be worked out by arithmetical calculation: what forces could the British land and maintain on the far shore of the Channel; what forces could Germany bring against them there? It was a question of numbers, equipment and, above all, the means of transportation. No administrative improvisation, no strategic or tactical ingenuity, no readiness for sacrifice could alter the verdict which statistics told in advance. The answer was that there could be no cross-channel invasion until a large part of Germany's strength had been drawn off to other fronts; until Britain's

¹⁰⁷ J.R. M. Butler. *Grand Strategy, Vol. 3. Part 2.* (London. H.M.S.O. 1964). 565.

arm had been reinforced from sources outside the Commonwealth and Empire, and until she had established command of the Atlantic supply routes and of the air over Western Europe".¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Churchill ordered the establishment of a Combined Operations Command whose purpose it was to plan for this objective and the carrying out of reconnaissance missions and low-level commando raids against the Continental coastlines. His directive to the Joint Planning Staff on 5 October 1940 that they undertake a feasibility study on possible offensive operations in Europe, "including the establishment of a bridgehead on the Cherbourg Peninsula"¹⁰⁹ is another example that he recognised this vital military goal.

Churchill promoted the notion of a re-deployment to Europe in the political arena. On 11 June, Churchill dispatched a telegram to Roosevelt in which he expressed his belief that "having saved the B.E.F. we do not lack troops at home and as soon as Divisions can be equipped on a much higher scale needed for Continental service they will be dispatched to France. Our intention is to have a strong army fighting in France for the campaign of 1941".¹¹⁰ He reiterated this stance in a cable on 25 July stating: "plans also ought to be made for coming to the aid of conquered populations by landing armies of liberation when the time is ripe. For this purpose it will be necessary, not only to have great numbers of tanks but also of vessels capable of carrying them and landing them direct on to beaches".¹¹¹ Churchill also spoke of these aspirations in the House of Commons. In his address from the dispatch box on 5 November, the Prime Minister claimed that Britain was engaging in building a strong army as despite the country's primary weapons being sea and air-based, a powerful land force was required to continue the war. He argued, "we must have a strong Army, well equipped, well armed, well trained and well organised, capable of intervening as the war

¹⁰⁸ Wilmot. 97-98.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 97.

¹¹⁰ Warren F. Kimball. *Churchill & Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*. (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, c1984). Volume 1. 43.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

proceeds in the liberation of one or other of the many countries which are yearning to throw off the odious Nazi yoke".¹¹²

Given the serious loss of equipment and weaponry in France and the strength of both the German land and air forces, such a view appears wildly optimistic, almost fantastic. Apart from the Dominion and Empire Governments pledging that they would also continue the war and commit troops to various theatres of operations, Britain was unable to secure an alliance with any other power following the Franco-German Armistice. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the American desire to remain outside of the European balance of power meant that both the Soviet Union and the US maintained their neutrality. Nevertheless, Churchill wasted little time in writing to Roosevelt and pleading for American assistance. On 15 May 1940, five days after entering Downing Street, he sent an emotional plea to the White House in which he stressed the rapid deterioration of the Allied position and Britain's need for immediate aid. Churchill asked that the US "should proclaim nonbelligerency, which would mean that you would help us with everything short of actually engaging armed forces".¹¹³ What the appeal 'everything short of actually engaging armed forces' amounted to in reality was the loan of forty to fifty old US Navy destroyers, several hundred of the latest US aircraft, anti-aircraft equipment and ammunition and raw materials. At the same time as he made this request, Churchill asked that an American naval squadron to Eire to deter any possible German infiltration of that country and charged Roosevelt "to keep that Japanese dog quiet in the Pacific, using Singapore in any way convenient".¹¹⁴

Roosevelt's sympathy lay with the British but with the Neutrality Laws still in effect the President could not allow the purchase of weaponry, equipment or resources with credit based in the US. Instead, Roosevelt proposed an alternative arrangement whereby the United States converted Britain's assets throughout the Western Hemisphere into cash as a means of financing their acquisitions but the British rejected this scheme as inequitable. The solution

¹¹² 'The War Situation, (The Autumn Balance Sheet)', Nov. 5, 1940, House of Commons, *Winston S. Churchill : His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963*. Edited by Robert Rhodes James. (New York, Chelsea House in association with Bowker, 1974). 6301.

¹¹³ Kimball. Volume 1. 37.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 36-37.

was the policy of 'Lend-Lease',¹¹⁵ and Kimball writes that this arrangement "permitted repayment of such subsidies in whatever manner the President authorised."¹¹⁶ Lend-Lease was finalised with an agreement that granted the US access to air and naval bases throughout Britain's territories in the Western Hemisphere for the next half century. This accord also enabled Roosevelt to circumvent the Neutrality Laws and his political opponents who wished to see the United States remain firmly outside of the conflict and refrain from offering any form of support to one side. Under the auspices of Lend-Lease, Roosevelt authorised the placing of orders for military equipment, and throughout 1941 Britain began to receive weaponry from US stocks. The bulk of this aid consisted predominantly of small arms and material for the infantry and, as a result, Britain's forces would remain beset by shortfalls in their equipment and equipment such as armour and heavy gunnery even after the US formally entered the war at the close of the year.

According to Howard, the course of action favoured by the Chiefs of Staff given this situation was for Britain to utilise what resources it possessed to diminish Germany's economic strength and the capacity of its war industry. He writes that Britain's best option for success "lay in postponing any decisive encounter for as long as possible, while using her sea-power to build up her own strength and her air-power to erode that of the enemy. If this could be done successfully, estimated the Chiefs of Staff in the summer of 1940, the German Empire might collapse from within; the German Army, paralysed by lack of petrol and by patriot revolts in the satellite nations, might be unable to fight; and the British Army could then return to the Continent, not to force a decisive engagement with the Wehrmacht, but to receive its surrender and restore order".¹¹⁷ The purpose of this campaign of aerial bombing and blockade could produce crippling shortages of food and oil stocks within the

¹¹⁵ The Lend-Lease Act was passed by the US Congress in 1941 and permitted the transfer of war materials to countries whose defence was considered vital to the security of the United States. The arrangement was originally designed to include only the British Empire and China however by November 1941, Lend-Lease was extended to the Soviet Union. In 1942, the act was extended to allow for US troops to be stationed in countries participating in the arrangement, for example, Australia and New Zealand. The term for this was 'Reverse Lend-Lease'.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 88.

¹¹⁷ Michael Howard. *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*. (London, Greenhill Books, 1993). 7.

Reich and “reckoned in September 1940, conditions might be such that a British striking force 30 divisions strong would be able to establish itself on the Continent and impose its own terms”.¹¹⁸

On 14 June, the Future Operational Planning Section outlined the limited range of options available to the British in a memorandum to the War Cabinet. The report, titled *Future Strategy: Review*¹¹⁹, claimed that the Germans needed only eight weeks to assemble the necessary force for Operation Sealion given its interior lines of operation while at the same time Britain faced a serious deficiency in its armoured capacity. Only three divisions within the Home Forces possessed their full complement of tanks and the Planners cautioned that although the Battle of Britain had concluded in the previous autumn, Fighter Command had not gained superiority over the Luftwaffe and many installations and facilities within the United Kingdom remained vulnerable to parachute assault. The Planning Staff also offered a reminder to the politicians that the nature of warfare had undergone a transformation as “in the old days, sea power gave us flexibility and we were often able to employ inferior numbers against outlying enemy forces. With the advent of air power, mechanisation and improvements in land communications (all of which favour “interior lines”) the advantage has passed to Germany”.¹²⁰ Therefore, Britain would not be able to undertake a return to the Continent in 1941 and the Planners argued that “nowhere on the Continent, even if it were possible for us to land, could we subsequently prevent the existing German Army and Air Force concentrating quickly in a strength we could not resist”.¹²¹ They estimated that the German military power at that time consisted of 250 divisions with 90 of them combat- ready and able to be deployed to meet any incoming threat although Britain could not avoid a confrontation if the outcome of the war was to be decided in its favour. The Planners pointed out “sometime, in order to impose our will upon the enemy, we must occupy and

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 8.

¹¹⁹ Future Operational Planning Section. *Future Strategy: Review*. J.P. (41) 444. 14 June 1941. PREM 3/333/4.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Section 1, Paragraph 2.

¹²¹ Ibid.

control portions of his territory. Ultimately, therefore, land operations are essential".¹²²

The solution that the Planners favoured was the degradation of Germany's military capability by diminishing the "economy which feeds it, the civilian morale which sustains it, the supplies which nourish it and the hopes of victory which give it courage. Then, and only then, can the German war machine, for all its army divisions and air geschwerders, be speeded by military action down the road to inevitable collapse".¹²³ The report highlighted the fact that as the threat of Sealion had diminished, "Germany, too is confined to a war of attrition on the British economy and morale".¹²⁴ The Planners were strident in their belief that the Second World War had become one of economic struggle and they made the case that in the First World War, "a complete military victory could forestall or reverse the results of economic struggle. But now we are faced with a situation where, except for the possibility open to Germany of an invasion of the United Kingdom, neither side can hope to bring to an end the resistance of his enemy unless that resistance has first been weakened by the destruction of his economy and the lowering of his morale".¹²⁵

Britain's examination of the methods in which it could engage the Axis other than through a direct cross-Channel assault continued throughout 1940 and 1941 even as the threat of Operation Sealion faded and the German divisions began their march eastward. The Wehrmacht maintained garrisons throughout France, the Low Countries and Norway. Although these forces consisted largely of reserve units, they still outnumbered the British in terms of troop numbers, equipment and land-based weaponry. As the *Future Strategy: Review* illustrated, the British believed that the Germans would easily counter any landing attempted by their forces and at this stage of the war, attrition offered the best method for engaging the Germans and for bringing about a possible victory. Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union meant that it was now fighting on the Eastern Front once again yet this offensive created an uncomfortable precedent for the British. They now had a new ally with different political doctrines with whom they would have to consult regarding

¹²² Ibid. Section 1, Paragraph 3.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. Section 1, Paragraph 4.

strategy for pursuing the war and one that would almost immediately exert pressure for the opening of the Second Front. Kimball writes that Moscow made its first request for such an operation or a similar enterprise in the Balkans in September of 1941 yet Churchill would only agree to it if Turkey entered the war on Britain's side.¹²⁶ The pressure on Britain to re-deploy its forces to North-West Europe had begun and it would increase with the entry of the United States into the war six months later.

¹²⁵ Ibid. Section 1, Paragraph 7.

¹²⁶ Kimball, 237.

CHAPTER THREE.

Britain's Policy on the Second Front in 1942.

"We whole-heartedly agree with your conception of concentration against the main enemy, and we cordially accept your plan with one broad qualification. As you will see from my 69 of the 15th April, it is essential that we should prevent a junction of the Japanese and Germans".

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt. 17 April 1942.

Churchill in Washington, December 1941.

Within two weeks of the attack on Pearl Harbour, Churchill and Roosevelt convened in Washington with their Chiefs of Staff¹²⁷ for their second meeting since Placentia Bay¹²⁸ but their first as wartime allies. The aim of this conference was to determine the course of Allied strategy and assimilate the command structures of both countries' armed forces. While the Americans scrambled to contain the Japanese advance in the Pacific, Churchill arrived in Washington having prepared what Gwyer describes as the "first sketch of the offensive strategy in Europe"¹²⁹ during his voyage aboard H.M.S. *Duke of York*. However, the strategy contained within this report was not a 'first sketch' but rather a statement of intent that the Allies abide by the principles that had underpinned British planning since June of the previous year. Churchill maintained his support for Britain's aerial offensive, despite this policy having failed to bring about Germany's internal disintegration or that of its armed forces. He wrote that he had "great hopes of affecting German production and German morale by ever more severe and more accurate bombing of their cities and harbours, and that this, combined with their Russian defeats, may

¹²⁷ The Prime Ministerial party consisted of those who were instrumental in shaping British policy. Accompanying Churchill was Lord Beaverbrook, then Minister for Supply, and Admiral Dudley Pound and Air Marshal Charles Portal, the Chiefs of Staff of the Royal Air Force and Royal Navy respectively. The party also included Field Marshal Sir John Dill who had served as CIGS for the first eighteen months of the war and who would remain in Washington as the head of Britain's military mission there.

¹²⁸ Placentia Bay is located Newfoundland, Canada. Churchill and Roosevelt convened there from 8 to 11 August 1941. Although the United States was several months away from joining the war, the conference is significant as it laid the foundation for the Atlantic Charter that the US and Britain worded and agreed to on 12 August. The two parties also agreed that the 26 countries in alliance against Germany would not seek a separate peace with Berlin.

produce important effects on the will of the German people, with consequential internal reactions upon the German government".¹³⁰ He also maintained his support for re-deploying forces to Europe and declared that the Allies needed, "to prepare for the liberation of the captive countries of Western and Southern Europe by the landing at suitable points, successively or simultaneously, of British and American armies strong enough to enable the conquered populations to revolt".¹³¹ However, Churchill did not identify Northwest France as the specific landing point for the Allied divisions. Instead, he envisaged the British and American formations landing in several countries throughout Europe, "namely, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, the French Atlantic coasts, as well as in Italy and possibly the Balkans, the German garrisons would prove insufficient to cope both with the strength of the liberating forces and the fury of the revolting peoples".¹³²

Britain's designation of the Mediterranean as the primary theatre of operations in 1942 was apparent in this submission. Churchill was optimistic that any success gained from Auchinleck's¹³³ desert offensive¹³⁴ would allow the Allies to secure Europe's southern periphery, induce Turkey over to their side and generate pressure on the Petain Government to allow the Allies access to its North African territories in return for France's re-constitution as a great power and the restoration of its Empire. Yet he expressed his scepticism that Vichy would make such a gesture and Churchill claimed that Britain would commit 55,000 men, including two armoured divisions, to see this objective realised in addition to those already serving under Auchinleck's command.¹³⁵ Churchill's summary of the situation was that "the war in the

¹²⁹ J.M.A. Gwyer and J.R.M. Butler. *Grand Strategy, Vol. 3, July 1941 – August 1942*. London, H.M.S.O. 1964. 336.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 329.

¹³¹ Ibid. 334.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck, 1884-1981, served in the ill-fated Norway campaign of 1940 before overseeing the formation of defences in Britain and India. In July 1941, he succeeded Wavell as Commander-in-Chief Middle East and commanded the British offensive into Libya in November 1941. After his forces were driven back into Egypt by Rommel he was relieved of his post and in June 1943 became Commander of British forces in India. He remained in that post until 1947 and was promoted Field Marshal in 1946.

¹³⁴ This offensive would eventually stall under Rommel's counterattack and the British and Commonwealth forces would not re-gain the initiative in the desert until after Montgomery's success at El-Alamien.

¹³⁵ Gwyer and Butler. 327. Churchill stated that this formation comprised of two divisions and an armoured formation.

West in 1942 comprises, as its main offensive effort, the occupation and control by Great Britain and the United States of the whole of the North and West African possessions of France, and the further control by Britain of the whole North African shore from Tunis to Egypt, thus giving, if the naval situation allows, free passage through the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal".¹³⁶

The first Washington Conference was a landmark summit as the British and the Americans agreed that the economic and military resources of each state would be centralised under a joint command structure. They also implemented what Wilmot calls the "fundamental basis of joint strategy"¹³⁷ with the 'Germany First' principle at its core and a policy to which the military staffs of the two countries had agreed during talks the previous February. Marshall viewed Germany as the key adversary and he decreed that once Germany had been defeated then Italy and Japan would collapse shortly thereafter. There were those in the US military, for example, MacArthur and King, who lobbied for the war-effort to be concentrated on Japan and operations throughout the Pacific Ocean and the White House was under strong pressure from the American public to press in that direction. However, Roosevelt agreed with Marshall and the 'Germany First' policy stood. This Presidential ruling provided the General with the mandate to begin putting plans for the invasion of Europe into practice.

Marshall and Hopkins in London: April 1942.

When Marshall and Hopkins arrived in London on 8 April for the follow-up discussions to the Washington Conference, the war had evolved from a European conflict into one with global dimensions. Singapore had been in Japanese hands for two months and Britain's forces in the Far East and the Mediterranean basin had crumbled under the weight of the Axis offensives. The presence of the Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff and the President's Personal Representative demonstrated the importance that the Roosevelt

¹³⁶ Ibid. 329.

¹³⁷ Wilmot. *The Struggle for Europe*. 100

Administration attached to the discussions and its determination to achieve a decisive strategy. The talks also provided America's senior military commander with the opportunity to present the case for an early and direct re-entry into Europe. However, the challenge facing the American delegation was overcoming the scepticism of the British High Command that the Allied ground forces lacked sufficient numbers and equipment for a direct confrontation with the Germans in Europe and the necessary protective screen in the air. Following a meeting of the C.O.S. on 28 March, Brooke noted these concerns in his diary: "We were discussing ways and means of establishing new Western Front. I have propounded theory that a Western Front, to be of use, must force withdrawal of forces from Russia, that it was impossible with land forces at our disposal to force the Germans to withdraw land forces from Russia; but what might induce them to withdraw air forces. But to do this a landing must take place within our air umbrella, namely in the vicinity of Calais or Boulogne. Mountbatten was still hankering after a landing near Cherbourg where proper air support is not possible".¹³⁸

Brooke's doubt over the viability of the Second Front would define his stance on the subject throughout the next two years as his mindset fixed upon the difficulties he believed the Western Allies faced in undertaking such an enterprise and his opinion that Marshall was unable to comprehend them. This lack of regard for Marshall's point of view or abilities as a commanding officer would characterise their relationship throughout the remainder of the war and Brooke's chronicles for 30 March and 9 April illustrated both thought processes. In the first entry, Brooke complained that he "was kept up till 1am discussing the possibilities of some kind of offensive in Northern France to assist Russia in the event of German attack successful, as it probably will be. A difficult problem – this universal cry to start a Western front is going to be hard to compete with, and yet what can we do with some 10 divisions against the German masses? Unfortunately the country fails to realise the situation we are in".¹³⁹ The latter entry stated, "Started COS at 9 am as Marshall was due at 10.30. He remained with us until 12.30pm and gave us a long talk on

¹³⁸ Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke. *War Diaries: 1939-1945*. Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman edited. (2001, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, London). 28 March 1942. 242.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 30 March 1942. 243.

his views concerning the desirability of starting Western front next September and that the USA forces would take part. However, the total force which they could transport by then only consisted of 2 ½ divisions!! No very great contribution. Furthermore they had not begun to realise what all the implications of their proposed plan were!”¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, Churchill sanctioned Marshall’s plan at a War Cabinet Defence Committee¹⁴¹ meeting on 14 April describing the American proposal as “momentous”¹⁴² and he professed that the “conception underlying it accorded with the classic principles of war – namely, concentration against the main enemy”.¹⁴³ Brooke concurred, and along with a note of caution, described the proceedings in his diary as “A momentous meeting at which we accepted their proposals for offensive action in Europe in 1942 perhaps and in 1943 for certain. They have not begun to realise all the implications of this plan and all the difficulties that lie ahead of us!”¹⁴⁴ Marshall’s immediate response to Britain’s acceptance was to express his relief that there was “a basic agreement on general principles”¹⁴⁵ and that “all were in complete agreement as to what should be done in 1943”.¹⁴⁶ He was also of the view that the Allies needed to prepare for possible deployment to the Continent during that year, especially if it became apparent that the Russians were collapsing in the face of the German offensives. Marshall’s rationale was that “the difficulties should not be insoluble by reason of the fact that we should have a great measure of air control. The size of our joint air programmes showed that this would be so, particularly as the German campaign against

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 9 April 1942. 246.

¹⁴¹ The War Cabinet Defence Committee was comprised of 12 men, including Churchill. This included Attlee, who served as Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs; Oliver Lyttelton, Minister of Production; Sir James Grigg; Secretary of States for War; Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff; General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of Imperial Staff; Anthony Eden, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs; A.V. Alexander, First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Archibald Sinclair, Secretary of State for Air; Air Chief Marshall Sir Charles Portal, Chief of Air Staff; Major General Sir Hastings L. Ismay, Office for the Minister of Defence; and, Vice Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations. Mr. Harry Hopkins who served as Roosevelt’s Personal Representative was also present at this meeting along with General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, United States Army.

¹⁴² War Cabinet Defence Committee (Operations). *Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th April, 1942*. D.O. (42) 10th Meeting. PREM3/333/6.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Alanbrooke. 14 April, 1942. 249.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Russia would absorb great resources and thus reduce the hazards of our operations".¹⁴⁷

Howard regards Churchill's consent to a cross-Channel assault as Britain signalling "its final and formal acceptance."¹⁴⁸ His case is that Marshall's scheme did not conflict with any of the strategies the British had considered at that time and it would not have been in their interest to reject the proposal when the United States Government faced strong domestic pressure to abandon the 'Germany First' principle and concentrate its offensive efforts in the Pacific. He writes: "the evidence suggests that both Mr. Churchill and his Chiefs of Staff were, in April 1942, entirely sincere in their acceptance of the Bolero-Round-up plan as expounded by General Marshall, and were determined to put it into effect. There was certainly not, at that time, any alternative and conflicting 'Mediterranean strategy'".¹⁴⁹ Wilmot also acknowledges that Britain welcomed the Marshall Plan, claiming that they "did not dispute Marshall's general thesis that 'the final blow against Germany must be delivered across the English Channel and eastward through the plains of Western Europe.'"¹⁵⁰

Although the British agreed to the 'principle' of a cross-Channel operation, they did so regarding 1943 and did not subscribe to any detail or timeframe. They were especially ill at ease with the prospect of the enterprise, referred to as Sledgehammer, commencing that year. Brooke's assessment as to the viability of Sledgehammer was that it was "governed by the measure of success achieved by the Germans in their campaign against Russia. If they were successful, we could clearly act less boldly. If, however, the Russians held the Germans, or had even greater measure of success, our object should be to force the Germans to detach their air forces from the Russian front".¹⁵¹ However, there was another force motivating the British. At the meeting on 14 April, Churchill insisted the Allies provide a defensive cover for India and the Middle East as the loss of 600,000 men was unacceptable to the Allied cause and he called for protection for Australia and the remaining

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*. 27.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 29.

¹⁵⁰ Wilmot. *The Struggle for Europe*. 103.

territories throughout the Pacific. Brooke supported his Premier's view that efforts were needed to ensure that the Japanese were checked and the Middle Eastern sphere secured and later wrote in his diary that "The fear I have is that they should concentrate on this offensive at the expense of all else! We have therefore been pressing on them the importance of providing American assistance in the Indian Ocean and Middle East".¹⁵² Both he and Churchill asked their American guests to dispatch warships to serve with the Home Fleet, as this would enable the Royal Navy to send units to the Indian Ocean and Churchill added the hope that Britain could deploy three carriers to that task. He conveyed to his guests his belief that "if, say, two or three more could be provided by the United States, we would have a force of aircraft carriers which would entirely change the situation in the Indian Ocean, but we should be able to master the Bay of Bengal and might intervene against the Japanese advance Northwards through Burma. Thus, the provision of these naval reinforcements would do more than the arrival in India of very large armies, and would be the surest way of keeping China in the war. At the same time, it would be the best possible means of ensuring that the great project on the Continent of Europe could go forward without interference".¹⁵³

Faced with the British lobbying, Hopkins spoke of the domestic pressure that the Roosevelt Administration was under to switch the weight of the American war effort towards Japan. He stated that although the United States recognised the importance of the Middle East, Russia and the Pacific, "the American decision had been governed by two main considerations. First, the United States wished to fight not only on the sea, but on land and in the air. Secondly, they wished to fight in the most useful place, and in the place where they could attain superiority, and they were desirous above all of joining in an enterprise with the British".¹⁵⁴ The United States would undertake its obligations to protect Australia and other theatres but Hopkins claimed "their whole heart would be fully engaged in the great plan now proposed".¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ War Cabinet Defence Committee (Operations). *Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th April, 1942*. D.O. (42) 10th Meeting. PREM3/333/6.

¹⁵² Alanbrooke. 14 April, 1942. 249.

¹⁵³ War Cabinet Defence Committee (Operations). *Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th April, 1942*. D.O. (42) 10th Meeting. PREM3/333/6.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

He pointed to the increase in landing craft production as an indication of this and claimed that while the United States was eager to fight alongside Britain "it was true, of course, that each country would be fighting for its own interests".¹⁵⁶ If Hopkins' comments were a threat to the British that the US could abandon the 'Germany First' policy, his hosts were prepared to promote their objectives regardless, both politically and militarily. Attlee responded to Hopkins by claiming that the British had been trying to survive in the war with limited resources but Britain "had great responsibilities in other parts of the world, and it was entirely right that we should safeguard these while concentrating our main striking force in the European theatre".¹⁵⁷

Portal's¹⁵⁸ concern was that Britain would not be able to maintain control of the air should an invasion of Europe take place in 1942. His calculation was that the campaign would involve 850 Spitfires but the R.A.F. stood to lose 1250 machines in the first two months of combat. There was only the production capacity for 900 new machines and 300 of these replacement aircraft would deploy to other theatres. Portal insisted that American aid was vital and stated that "without American assistance, by the end of two months the fighter force of this country would be virtually wiped out".¹⁵⁹ The solution would be to use all the aircraft manufactured in Britain for cover of the beachhead and this would only be possible if the United States dispatched their air forces to all other theatres, therefore assuming responsibility for protection and preservation of the Middle East and Indian Ocean. Marshall had not helped his case by informing the Committee that the American contribution to any cross-Channel operation that year would be modest given

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Charles Portal, 1893-1971, joined the British Army in 1914 and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps in the following year. By the end of the First World War, he had qualified as a Flying Officer, winning the Military Cross and the Distinguished Flying Cross and held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He joined the Royal Air Force in 1927 as a squadron commander and in 1934 was sent to Aden to command British forces stationed there. He was promoted Air Commodore in 1935 and in 1937 joined the staff at the Imperial Defence College with the rank of Air Vice Marshal. In 1940, Portal was appointed head of Bomber Command and he was knighted in 1940 and promoted to the rank of Air Chief Marshal and Chief of Air Staff. In conjunction with Arthur Harris, his successor at Bomber Command, he devised the policy of area bombing aimed at destroying the German cities and undermining civilian morale. He was created Baron Portal in August 1945 and in the years following the war served as Controller of Atomic Energy from 1946 to 1951 followed by Chairman of the British Aircraft Corporation in 1960. He died on 22 April 1971.

the time and shipping constraints and Mountbatten's reaction was to counter that once this inflow occurred then the Allies could begin examining ways to implement the American plan.

Despite these initial concerns over Sledgehammer and the Axis threats to Britain's Middle East and Indian Ocean theatres, Churchill closed the meeting with the ruling that there was "complete unanimity on the framework."¹⁶⁰ He announced that he would be cabling Roosevelt to request resources for the Indian Ocean and stated that "he could assure Mr. Hopkins and General Marshall that nothing would be left undone on the part of the British Government and people which could contribute to the success of the great enterprise on which they were about to embark".¹⁶¹ However, precedents had been set as although his closing statement was effusive, the Prime Minister made no firm commitment to prioritise Europe ahead of any particular region. Nor was there any acceptance of a timetable. It also appeared that while the Churchill Government and its senior military commanders appeared to have agreed to the 'principle' of liberating Europe they were also determined that British interests abroad would not be sacrificed in the process of searching for a way back into Europe.

Brooke's scepticism towards the Second Front and his dim view of Marshall's strategic ability was intensifying amidst further interaction between the two commanders. On 15 April, Brooke wrote that he thought Marshall, "a good general at raising armies and providing the necessary links between the military and political worlds. But his strategical ability does not impress me at all!! In fact in many respects he is a very dangerous man whilst being a very charming one!"¹⁶² Brooke believed that Marshall's agenda in pressing for the cross-Channel plan was to deflect pressure from King and MacArthur for resources for the Pacific and a reaction to political opinion that called for assistance to Russia above all else. His account of such a policy was that it was "also popular with all military men who are fretting for an offensive policy. But, and this is a very large 'but', his plan does not go beyond landing on the

¹⁵⁹ War Cabinet Defence Committee (Operations). *Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 14th April, 1942*. D.O. (42) 10th Meeting. PREM3/333/6.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Alanbrooke. 15 April 1942. 249.

coast!! Whether we are to play baccarat or chemin de fer at Le Tourquet, or possibly bathe at Paris Plage is not stipulated! I asked him this afternoon – do we go east, south or west after the landing? He had not begun to think about it”!!¹⁶³

Questioning the Cross-Channel Enterprise.

Following the April discussions, British planning for the Second Front moved into a practical phase with the establishment of the Bolero Combined Committee in Washington that had the mandate of overseeing the transportation of American personnel and equipment across the Atlantic Ocean. However, despite the establishment of this Committee, doubts began to surface increasingly throughout the British military hierarchy. On 22 May, Pound¹⁶⁴, Portal and Nye¹⁶⁵ issued an *aide memoiré* to Churchill in which they discussed the feasibility for offensive operations in the European theatre throughout 1942 and 1943.¹⁶⁶ They claimed that the objective of Britain's offensive action so far had been to relieve pressure on the Soviet Union and to draw German air and land units away from the Russian Front¹⁶⁷ involving a series of low-level raids using Special Forces and a series of fighter sweeps against the European coastline. Yet the Chiefs made no commitment towards the launching of either Sledgehammer or Round Up in their communication. Instead, they promised that Britain would “increase the scale of land, sea and air operations against Western Europe which have as their object to force the enemy air strength to engage our fighters in heavy air fighting, and to contain large numbers of A/A defences on the whole Western Front. Concurrently

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Dudley Pound, 1877-1943, was Admiral of the Fleet and First Sea Lord from 1939 until his death from ill-health in October 1943.

¹⁶⁵ Sir Archibald Edward Nye, 1895-1967, served as Vice Chief of Imperial General Staff from 1941 until 1946.

¹⁶⁶ British Chiefs of Staff. *Offensive Operations, 1942-1943, in the European Theatre*. Aide Memoire. 22 May 1942. PREM3/333/8.

¹⁶⁷ As well as having to deal with the losses and threat to the Empire, Britain was coming under increased pressure from Stalin to engage in action against the Germans on Continental Europe. This pressure would intensify that same month as Molotov, on a visit to Washington, claimed to have obtained Roosevelt's guarantee that Moscow could expect the opening of a Second Front in 1942. Although the British Government refused to offer the same guarantees

smaller raids will continue to worry him and make him spread his forces wastefully".¹⁶⁸

Although Britain would be making all possible preparations to increase the scale of their operations against Europe throughout 1942, there would be a limit as to what they could achieve. The memorandum reported that "the nature of the coast and its defences are such that against an enemy who intends to fight, special landing craft are necessary. Hence, the size of the forces which we can employ and maintain is limited by the numbers of those craft we have available. Unfortunately, this number is still too small to land and maintain a force capable of remaining on the Continent against the present scale of opposition. We have every intention, however, of carrying out operations in the summer of the nature of a major raid".¹⁶⁹ The Chiefs contended that the British and Americans could re-enter Europe in 1942 "if opposition to an assault were sufficiently reduced by either the removal of forces or by a deterioration in the fighting value of the enemy". If these conditions were evident then the Western Allies could deploy immediately but an operation scheduled for the following year was more plausible. This would enable Britain to assemble sufficient numbers of landing craft and they would have achieved control of the air space. Until then, all the US and Britain could do would be to build up their forces under Bolero which in the Chiefs' view "will cause the Germans increasing anxiety and, by so doing, help contain forces in Western Europe which otherwise be fighting on the Russian Front".¹⁷⁰

The British expressed these concerns to Molotov when he visited London in June. A Ministry of Defence *aide memoire*, issued in preparation, cited insufficient troop numbers and the consequence of failure as the reasons why the British were hesitant about embarking upon any immediate operation in North-West Europe. The report contended that the British Government was "making preparations for a landing on the Continent in August or September

when Molotov passed through London, this issue would become one of much contention, mistrust, hostility between Moscow and the Western Allies as the war progressed.

¹⁶⁸ British Chiefs of Staff. *Offensive Operations, 1942-1943, in the European Theatre*. Aide Memoire. 22 May 1942. PREM3/333/8.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

1942”¹⁷¹ but it went on to point out that “the main limiting factor to the size of the landing force is the availability of special landing craft. Clearly, however, it would not further either the Russian cause or that of the Allies as a whole if, for the sake of action at any price, we embarked on some operation which ended in disaster and gave the enemy an opportunity for glorification at our discomfiture. It is impossible to say in advance whether the situation will be such as to make this operation feasible when the time comes. We can therefore give no promise in the matter, but, provided that it appears sound and sensible, we shall not hesitate to put our plans into effect”.¹⁷²

Despite this unease within the military hierarchy, Churchill explored the viability of a cross-Channel enterprise, reiterating several of the themes that were contained in his report to Roosevelt earlier in the year. His presentation to the Cabinet and the Chiefs of Staff on 15 June¹⁷³ began with the assertion that any invasion needed to be one that was characterised by magnitude, simultaneity and violence. Churchill returned to the theory that more than one landing needed to occur and these feints would draw the German forces away from the assault beaches. He wrote that “the enemy cannot be ready everywhere. At least six heavy disembarkations must be attempted in the wave. The enemy should be further mystified by at least half-a-dozen feints, which, if luck favours them, may be exploited”.¹⁷⁴ Alongside the simultaneous landings in Denmark, Holland and Belgium Churchill envisaged that Operation Jupiter, the proposed landing in Norway, would have commenced as well. Churchill made the case that ten armoured divisions needed to be ashore in the first wave. Along with having to accept the high risks involved in their assault, these formations would have been tasked with pushing deep behind the German coastal defences, mobilising local resistance groups, disrupting enemy lines of communication and forcing the Germans to engage in combat over a wide area, thus spreading their forces. The second wave was to have landed behind this initial assault at four or five carefully chosen points on the European coastline. If the British could occupy three of these points then this

¹⁷¹ Churchill. *Aide Memoire*. Prepared for meeting with Molotov. 10 June 1942. PREM3/333/8.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Churchill. ‘Operation Round-Up’. *Selection of Papers on Future Operations*. C.O.S. (42) 169 (0). PREM3/333/9. 15 June 1942.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

would enable them to build-up a concentration of armour and men ashore and from there the battle would have taken shape. This plan also called for the seizure of airfields within the vicinity of the immediate battlefield to which R.A.F. squadrons would deploy.

The operation along with the feints would have had to achieve their objectives within a week of the initial landings commencing. Churchill estimated that 400,000 men would have been required and “the moment any port is gained and open, the Third wave of attack should start. This will be carried from our Western ports in large ships. It should comprise not less than 300,000 infantry with their own artillery plus part of that belonging to the earlier-landed formations”.¹⁷⁵ This would have meant that over 700,000 Allied troops in total would have been involved. Churchill acknowledged that there would have been a high casualty rate under this proposal. When discussing the air component of the attack he wrote that “abnormal wastage must be accepted in this first phase,”¹⁷⁶ although after the landings had taken place, “the phase of sudden violence irrespective of losses being over, the further course of the campaign may follow the normal and conventional lines of organisation and supply. It then becomes a matter of reinforcement and concerted movement. Fronts will have developed, and orderly progress will be possible”.¹⁷⁷ Churchill concluded with a warning as to the possibility of failure. He wrote that “unless we are prepared to commit the immense forces comprised in the first three waves to a hostile shore with the certainty then many of our attack will miscarry, and that if we fail the whole stake will be lost, we ought not to attempt such an extraordinary operation of war under modern conditions”.¹⁷⁸

On the same day in which he issued this memorandum, Churchill convened a meeting of the War Cabinet Chief of Staff Committee at which he reiterated his view that the success of a cross-Channel assault depended on “the magnitude and violence of the first assault, which should be carried out

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

on the broadest possible front".¹⁷⁹ The Prime Minister had adjusted his plan in that he now expounded the benefits of landing a force on the northern coast of Spain and having it push into France from that direction. He also acknowledged that it would take time for the Allies to get a Continental port into working order given the presence of mines and that the assault troops would have to be maintained for a considerable period while still on the beaches. Brooke's response was lukewarm and despite admitting that neither he nor the C.O.S. had read the minute, he continued to maintain that the assault itself was not the only difficulty that the Allies needed to overcome. Brooke countered that "one of the principal difficulties would be to link up our various local bridgeheads to form a cohesive front and then to pour in the reinforcing divisions at a greater rate than the Germans could move their formations against us".¹⁸⁰ The CIGS also contended that the Allies would have to capture two of the major ports on the French Coast not just the one. Mountbatten concurred although he pointed out that given the weather conditions in Western Europe it was essential that 'sheltered harbours'¹⁸¹ be secured rather than specifically targeting a port or a beach. Mountbatten argued that the Allies "could probably dispense with the harbour facilities for some time provided that we could get the use of the sheltered beaches".¹⁸²

The conclusion of the meeting involved a discussion as to the effect that the diversion of American forces to other theatres would have on Round-Up. The minutes from this meeting record that there was consensus that for American forces to gain combat experience "it has been suggested that they should send land forces to the Middle East, or, possibly, should take over the Levant-Caspian front".¹⁸³ Here it is possible to see pieces of the British case regarding the Second Front falling into place. Brooke pointed out that there was a serious shipping shortage with forces deploying to other theatres and that this was affecting the Bolero build-up but at the same time, Britain could not afford to send two more divisions to the Middle East. Mountbatten gave a reminder to the Committee that Roosevelt was anxious to see American

¹⁷⁹ *Extract from C.O.S Committee. C.O.S. (42) 52nd MG (0). 15 June 1942. Reference to the minutes from C.O.S. (42) 169 (0) PREM3/333/2.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

forces actively participating in the war provided a neat solution and it is perhaps no surprise that Brooke's solution was Operation Gymnast.

By the end of June, the C.O.S. had considered Churchill's memorandum in detail and had come up with a set of conclusions of its own. In a War Cabinet Committee Paper titled, *'Operation 'Round-Up': Note by Commanders-in-Chief*,¹⁸⁴ Paget, Douglas and Ramsey¹⁸⁵ agreed that a cross-Channel operation required the concepts of magnitude, simultaneity and violence if it was to succeed and that it must be based upon the following principles:

- (1) Disregard of losses in the initial phase,
- (2) Deep penetration from the outset,
- (3) The early capture and use of enemy aerodromes,
- (4) The early capture of major ports ,
- (5) A very high rate of landing of large numbers of armoured units and lightly equipped infantry.¹⁸⁶

The Chiefs agreed that the Allied armour would need to penetrate inland as quickly as possible, offering the areas of Pas de Calais, the Seine Estuary and the Cotentin Peninsula as the best demarcation points for an attack designed to capture the ports of Le Havre and Rouen. The Chiefs argued that it was unlikely that the French ports would be blocked or mined and therefore could be opened easily once in British hands and would be suitable for receiving American reinforcements. The report also stated that the capture of enemy aerodromes early in the operation would be crucial to its success and the Pas de Calais region as one where the R.A.F. could engage the Luftwaffe in conditions favourable to themselves in an effort to prevent the Germans from destroying the landings from the air. However, there was a note of caution in that the German demolition of the road and rail bridges in that area presented an impediment to any advance inland and the coastal defences would hamper the build-up of support troops and logistics. The suppression of

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Operation Round-Up: Note by Commanders-in-Chief*. C.O.S. (42) 190 (0). 29 June 1942. PREM3/333/2. On the cover of this report, the C-in-C's stated that, "attached are the comments which we were invited to make on the memorandum by the Prime Minister on Operation "ROUND-UP" (C.O.S. (42) 169 (0) of 15th June, 1942).

¹⁸⁵ General B. Paget, C-in-C Home Forces; Air Chief Marshal W.S. Douglas, C-in-C Fighter Command; Admiral B.H. Ramsay, Naval C-in-C.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

these defences would require additional Allied firepower and the Chiefs stated that “it would be most unwise to employ ships offshore or on the beaches until the defences are silenced”.¹⁸⁷

While the objectives were identifiable, the Chiefs warned that the Allies lacked the means of transporting enough troops to the Continent to see them realised. They wrote: “from our examination of the problem up to date, we are convinced that the initial scale and tempo of the operation are limited by the capacity of the assault craft and shipping which we are informed will be available in the Spring of 1943; by the capacity of the assault beaches, and particularly of the exit times from them; by the speed with which we can develop major ports and aerodromes; and by the capacity of ports in England from which the assaults must be launched and built up”.¹⁸⁸ They also claimed that “the assaults which we estimate we must undertake will use up all the craft capable of lifting forces furnished with the minimum of mobile equipment to enable them to operate efficiently ashore; and will leave unused only personnel carrying craft, for which there are no corresponding M.T.¹⁸⁹ carrying craft, and also some assault shipping which is unsuitable for employment in the Channel.¹⁹⁰ This surplus of craft and assault shipping could only be employed on diversions which do not require mobile supporting equipment for the assault or subsequent maintenance over beaches”.¹⁹¹

The estimation of the Allied lifting capacity was a fundamental difference between the commanders and the Prime Minister’s plan. The C-in-C’s believed that the total capacity for one lift, using all the shipping and landing craft that would be available on 1 April 1943, would amount to 106,000 men and 14,700 tanks, guns and vehicles. They reduced this estimation further citing the limited number of vehicle exits at the chosen beaches, the limited number of tanks and motor landing craft and the need to hold shipping and craft back until the shore defences had been neutralised. This calculation immediately ruled out Sledgehammer, as the C-in-C’s estimated that by 7 December 1943, the Allies would have transported 270,000 men and 30,500

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Motor Transport.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

vehicles to the Continent as opposed to Churchill's calculations of 400,000 men and 46,030 vehicles. By 14 December, these figures would have risen to 430,000 men and 57,000 vehicles, which was a figure much below the Prime Minister's assessment of 700,000 men and 93,271 vehicles being ashore at this stage. This military assessment made no allowance for any disruptions caused by adverse weather conditions and nor did it take into account the lift capacity required to deliver stores for the troops as at this point in time this issue was still under consideration. The C-in-C's concluded this section by claiming "it is impossible to increase the number of fighting men shown in our estimate above, since the additional motor transport required to lift their essential weapons and ammunition cannot be landed and cleared from the beaches".¹⁹² Only a reduction in the number of administrative vehicles used in the operation would allow the deployment of more men, transport vehicles or armour to Europe.

The report was also critical of Churchill's proposal for diversionary raids in Denmark and the Low Countries as these would only draw resources away from the main effort and, unless they were conducted on a large scale, they amounted to what the military described as "an unsound dispersal of effort".¹⁹³ The C-in-C's argued that even if shipping was available there was no guarantee that the feints would deceive the Germans and it would be difficult to justify these tactics under such circumstances. If employed they should be limited to the Bay of Biscay area. Instead, the military analysis of Churchill's plan called for three to four large-scale assaults that coincided with each other. Given the presence of strong shore-based defences, the assault could not take place along a narrow stretch of the coastline, as any attack of this nature would be vulnerable to flanking artillery and machinegun fire. Hence, while the senior military officers who prepared this report may have agreed with Churchill on simultaneity, violence and magnitude, they were unimpressed with the Prime Minister's tactical counsel.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

The Consolidation of the British Strategic Plan.

When Churchill and Roosevelt convened for the Second Washington Conference on 19 June, Britain's uppermost military commanders and political leaders had become vehement in expressing their view that Sledgehammer was not viable. The debate over how best to utilise the American forces in combat against the Germans that year was on the discussion table, but for Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff, there would be no deployment in North-West Europe in 1942. Churchill's memorandum to the President on 20 June stated that the British would not favour an operation that sacrificed six to eight divisions and that such an outcome would not only be of no assistance to the Soviet Union but also compromise any possible enterprise in 1943. Churchill wrote that "No responsible British military authority has so far been able to make a plan for September 1942 which had any chance of success unless the Germans become utterly demoralised, of which there is no likelihood. Have the American Staff's a plan? If so, what is it? What forces would be employed? At what points would they strike? What landing-craft and shipping are available? Who is the officer prepared to command the enterprise? What British forces and assistance are required? If a plan can be found which confers a reasonable prospect of success His Majesty's Government will cordially welcome it and will share to the full with their American comrades the risks and sacrifices. This remains our settled and agreed policy".¹⁹⁴ The British proposed that if there was to be a deployment of American forces against the Wehrmacht that year then North Africa provided a more suitable theatre of operations¹⁹⁵ as Churchill alluded to in his conclusion. His final argument was that "in case no plan can be made in which any responsible authority has good confidence, and consequently no engagement on a substantial scale in France is possible in September 1942, what else are we going to do? Can we afford to stand idle in the Atlantic theatre during the whole of 1942? Ought we not be preparing within the general structure of

¹⁹⁴ Warren Kimball. *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence. Volume 2.* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984). 515.

¹⁹⁵ Churchill also favoured Operation Jupiter (the invasion of Norway) however, this was opposed by the Chiefs of Staff and the plan was eventually shelved.

BOLERO some other operation by which we may gain positions of advantage and also directly or indirectly to take some weight off Russia? It is in this setting and on this background that the operation GYMNAST should be studied?"¹⁹⁶

When Marshall, Hopkins and King returned to London for further talks in July,¹⁹⁷ Britain's determination for operations in the Mediterranean had strengthened and Brooke in particular was resolved that this course would be pursued. The day before the American delegation arrived, he wrote in his diary: "Spent most of the morning preparing for visit of Harry Hopkins, Marshall and King, who are on their way over now, arriving early tomorrow morning. They have come over as they are not satisfied that we are adhering sufficiently definitely to the plans for invading France in 1943, and if possible 1942. In my mind 1942 is dead off and without the slightest hope. 1943 must depend on what happens to Russia. If she breaks and is overrun there can be no invasion and we must be prepared to go into North Africa instead".¹⁹⁸ Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff presented this view as formal government policy when the War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee¹⁹⁹ met with the Americans on 18 July.²⁰⁰ Although the British were prepared to examine any proposal Marshall could offer along with preparations for Round-Up, the Prime Minister and the High Command had concluded that "there was general agreement in this country that SLEDGEHAMMER was not a feasible or sensible operation".²⁰¹ The preferred operational preference was the Mediterranean and the Committee stated that "in respect of action in 1942, the only feasible proposition appeared to be GYMNAST. It would be much to

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Kimball claims that Marshall, Hopkins and King arrived in London with instructions from Roosevelt to bring US forces into action against Germany in 1942. If the Russians collapsed under renewed German offensives then Sledgehammer would become imperative, however if the reverse transpired then the cross-Channel enterprise would be a possibility in the following year. He writes that, "Roosevelt went on to emphasise the need to hold the middle East and suggested two alternative methods: dispatching aid and ground troops to the Persian Gulf, Syria, and Egypt, or an operation in Morocco/Algeria (GYMNAST). Once again the President flatly repudiated any notion of an all-out American effort against Japan, since Germany remained the greater threat". Warren Kimball. *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence. Volume 2.* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1984). 533.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. 17 July 1942. 281.

¹⁹⁹ Present were Churchill, Brooke, Pound, Portal and Ismay.

²⁰⁰ War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Minutes of Meeting held at Chequers on Saturday, 18th July, at 10.30p.m.* C.O.S. (42) 75th Meeting (0). PREM3/333/9.

our advantage to get a footing in North Africa cheap, in the same way as the Germans got Norway cheap by getting there first".²⁰² The British argued that Gymnast should be "the right wing of our "second front". An American occupation of Casablanca and district would not be sufficient. The operations would have to extend to Algiers, Oran and possibly further east. If the Americans could not supply the forces for all of these, we might undertake the more easterly operations with British troops accompanied by small American contingents".²⁰³

The American defence of any cross-Channel enterprise was strident and Brooke complained in his diary that he found Marshall and King, "still hankering after an attack across Channel this year to take pressure off Russia. They failed to realise that such an attack could only lead to the loss of some 6 divisions without achieving any result!"²⁰⁴ The Americans did alter their plan to include Sledgehammer as an operational first step towards a permanent deployment on the Continent but the British refused any compromise. Brooke recorded that "I put all the disadvantages to them. They did not return to the attack but stated that they would now have to put the matter up to the President and wished to see the PM first. I therefore fixed up for 3pm meeting with PM and went round to explain to him how matters stood and to discuss with him most profitable line of action".²⁰⁵ Brooke found powerful allies for his stance in both Churchill and Roosevelt and this was his trump card. When Roosevelt cabled London to state his preference for an offensive in North Africa on July 23rd and cast his veto on Sledgehammer, he presented Marshall and those supporting the Second Front with their *fait accompli*.

The momentum had now shifted decisively towards campaigning in the Mediterranean. On 26 July, Churchill sent Roosevelt a telegram in which he expressed his opposition towards Sledgehammer and provided another example of his inconsistent thinking towards strategy. Churchill appears to endorse Sledgehammer, albeit as part of an operation involving Torch and it

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid. Section 1, Paragraph C.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Alanbrooke. 20 July 1942. 282.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 22 July 1942. 282-284.

is unclear why he would do so except to suggest that he may have believed it would soften any American opposition towards a Mediterranean offensive or perhaps he believed at that moment in time such an enterprise was possible. Whatever his rationale, he wrote that the Allies “must establish a second front this year and attack at the earliest moment. As I see it this second front consists of a main body holding the enemy pinned opposite SLEDGEHAMMER and a wide flanking movement called TORCH (hitherto called GYMNAST).²⁰⁶ Churchill still pressed for Jupiter and stated that “we must also work up SLEDGEHAMMER with the utmost vigour”.²⁰⁷

In the context of the July talks and Marshall's failure to persuade the British to adopt Sledgehammer, this telegram is something of an anomaly. Churchill was not prepared to ‘work up to Sledgehammer with the utmost vigour’ because in the same telegram he cautioned Roosevelt that, “nothing must interfere with TORCH”,²⁰⁸ and on the 27th he outlined his plans for Torch, contradicting Marshall's proposal that the Allies land on Morocco's Atlantic coast with the demand that the landings take place further to the east.²⁰⁹ With the appointment of Eisenhower as Supreme Commander for Torch and the acceptance by the British that it would be an American-led operation, the passage of time had dealt Sledgehammer its fatal blow. On 24 October, Churchill dismissed it outright in a memorandum to the War Cabinet²¹⁰ citing large concentrations of German ground forces in the Pas de Calais area along with a strong Luftwaffe concentration that stood ready to counter the Allied threat. There was also the criticism that the beaches and tides were unfavourable to any amphibious landing and that the area's ports were either too shallow for shipping or landing craft or destroyed.

This statement would appear to mirror what the Commanders-in-Chief had said in their June report and would indicate that Churchill himself now was thinking along similar lines even though he refused to dismiss the possibility of a cross-Channel assault altogether. Nevertheless his summation of

²⁰⁶ Kimball, Volume 2. 26 July 1942. 543.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Marshall feared that Spain would allow the Germans to block the Straits of Gibraltar hence his case that a landing that far west was required.

²¹⁰ Churchill. *Policy for the Conduct of the War: Memorandum by the Minister of Defence*. Printed for the War Cabinet. 24 October 1942. PREM3/499/4.

Sledgehammer was that “it would have little chance of success, unless the Germans were completely demoralised and virtually in collapse, observing that it would have to be either an assault on the Pas de Calais, where the enemy is strongest and conditions are most adverse, or alternatively, an opposed landing at some point outside air cover. Personally I was sure that the newly raised United States formations, as well as our own somewhat matured forces could not establish themselves on the French coast, still less advance far inland, in the teeth of well-organised German opposition”.²¹¹ Regarding the Second Front, he reminded the Cabinet that “both the President and I continued to regard it as the main and most attractive form of the first American impact upon the Western theatre of war,”²¹² but it was secondary to Gymnast. The Prime Minister stated that “it was agreed that further resolute efforts should be made to overcome the obvious dangers and difficulties of the enterprises, and that, if a sound and sensible plan could be contrived we should not hesitate to give effect to it. It was also agreed that, as an alternative for 1942, the Gymnast plan should be completed in all details as soon as possible”.²¹³ Churchill claimed that throughout the discussions with Marshall and King in July, he had convinced them of Gymnast’s benefits and viability and that this operation represented the first phase in the Allied offensive plan to achieve victory but that all operations in 1943 depended upon its success. There is a sense of optimism within Churchill’s words. He wrote: “not only shall we open a route under air protection through the Mediterranean, but we shall be in a position to attack the under-belly of the Axis at whatever may be the softest point, i.e. Sicily, Southern Italy or perhaps Sardinia; or again, if circumstance warrant, or as they may do, compel, the French Riviera or perhaps even, with Turkish aid, the Balkans. However this may turn out, and it is silly to try to peer too far ahead, our war from now on till the summer of 1943 will be waged in the Mediterranean theatre”.²¹⁴ Churchill argued that while it was important not to disregard Round-Up, the operation was in his words, “retarded”.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

No Second Front in 1942, Doubts Over 1943.

Agreement from British Chiefs of Staff towards this position came in a paper that they presented to the War Cabinet six days later.²¹⁶ In this document, Brooke, Pound and Portal stated that it was no longer possible for the Allies to land large-scale forces on the Continent at that point in time. The British Empire was approaching its maximum capacity for military and industrial expansion and the Allies were “not yet out of the dangerous period of the war”.²¹⁷ Once again, the Chiefs contended that the sea routes through the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans still needed securing and consequently, the Allies needed to prepare for commitments in the Mediterranean. The Chiefs placed the Mediterranean alongside France and the Low Countries and Norway as possible theatres for amphibious operations and ranked them in terms of importance in this order. They made the case that at the successful conclusion of Torch the ring around Germany would tighten. Thus, Sardinia and Sicily would be open to Allied invasion and they could extend their control throughout the western and central Mediterranean. If the region became a liability for the Germans, they would have to deploy increasing forces to hold their position in Italy and throughout the Balkans thus dissipating their strength in Western Europe and relieving the pressure on Russia.

The report claimed that Russia was the only country capable of defeating the Germans in the field at that time and that “an unsuccessful invasion resulting in a large Allied defeat would be a disaster. It would compromise Allied power for further offensive action and would be devastating to the morale of occupied Europe”.²¹⁸ The Chiefs wrote of the efforts Britain had undertaken to undermine the industrial and military power of the Reich and that “our attrition of Germany has hitherto been comprised of bombing, blockade, raid and subversive action.”²¹⁹ Nevertheless, they also made their opposition to Jupiter apparent. The landings in Norway would not be possible

²¹⁶ Brooke, Pound, Portal. *American-British Strategy Report*. War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee Paper. C.O.S. (42) 345 (0) Final. PREM3/499/6. 30 October 1942.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

owing to tactical difficulties and nor were Allies in a position to attack Spain should it have entered the war on the Axis side or be threatened by German incursion. The solution lay with a Mediterranean strategy and the paper stressed that "this area must therefore be regarded as a potential defensive commitment, rather than one in which we should deliberately assail Germany's military power".²²⁰ Having identified this region as the main area for amphibious operations, the Chiefs claimed that "preparations for a re-entry to the Continent from the United Kingdom should be brought up to the highest pitch of readiness, provided there is no interference meanwhile with a relentless programme of bombing blockade and general attrition, or with amphibious operations in the Mediterranean. British resources for amphibious warfare are insufficient, however, to provide for a full-scale cross-Channel combined operation in 1943 at the same time as sustaining our amphibious campaign abroad".²²¹

This is an important report regarding Britain's policy as it showed that as far as the High Command was concerned the viability of a cross-Channel enterprise, even in 1943, had clearly diminished to the point that it had become a secondary consideration when placed alongside a Mediterranean offensive. In the wake of Operation Torch,²²² Ismay,²²³ a strong advocate of Mediterranean operations, issued a memorandum to the C.O.S. in which he cautioned "to make no more use of the success of Torch and Lightfoot in 1943 would be most regrettable. I should be very sorry to see this report being accepted as the limit of our action".²²⁴ Ismay's desire was that the Allies should not be content with capturing just Sicily, Sardinia and raids such as that which took place at Dieppe. As an alternative "the effort for the campaign of 1943 should be a strong pinning down of the enemy in Northern France

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Torch opened on 8 November with simultaneous landings at Algiers, Oran and Casablanca.

²²³ Hastings Ismay, 1887-1965, served in India and Somaliland during the First World War before joining the Imperial Defence Committee in 1926 with the rank of Major General. He served as Chief of Staff to Churchill throughout the Second World War before serving as aide to Mountbatten in India in 1946 and as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations from 1951 to 1952 in Churchill's second administration. From 1952 until 1957, he served as Secretary General of NATO and died in 1965.

and the Low Countries by continuous preparations to invade, and a decisive attack on Italy, or better still, Southern France, together with Operations not involving serious shipping expense, and other forms of pressure to bring in Turkey, and operate over land with the Russians into the Balkans".²²⁵ Ismay's point was that if Torch was not going to be exploited and expanded upon then it was nothing more than a waste of the Allies' time and resources. However, once French North Africa was in Allied hands, they should then move against the 'under-belly' of the Axis, and this should be the route back into western and central Europe.

Throughout his diary entries for December, Brooke wrote of Churchill's continued commitment towards Round-Up and of his efforts to dissuade him from adopting this policy and remain committed to Mediterranean operations. Brooke also used the C.O.S. memorandums to the Prime Minister to reaffirm his case. For example, on 1 December 1942,²²⁶ the C.O.S. used the argument that inadequate shipping, manpower and landing craft resources prevented the Allies operating throughout the Mediterranean while at the same time as preparing for Round-Up. The Chiefs claimed that if six infantry divisions and one Royal Marine division were diverted to Torch then there would be only eight divisions remaining in the United Kingdom. Nine US divisions could reinforce these units but this number would have been inadequate for a direct confrontation with the Germans. Therefore, the Chiefs concluded that, "it is indeed extremely doubtful whether we could stage an effective "Round-Up" against an unbroken German Army by July 1943, even if we were to curtail the build-up of "Torch", give complete priority to the American land forces over their air forces and abandon all operations in the Mediterranean itself. But it is certain that we cannot pursue both these objectives simultaneously".²²⁷

In a paper to the Chiefs of Staff on 3 December, Churchill admitted that Torch had made serious demands on shipping and landing craft resources and there was a vacuum in the replacement of these craft and trained crews.

²²⁴ General Hastings L. Ismay. *Memorandum to C.O.S. Committee*. 9 November 1942. PREM 3/499/6.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ Chiefs of Staff. *Memorandum to the Prime Minister*. 1 December 1942. PREM3/499/7

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

Although the Russians had been lobbying for the Second Front since entering the war, Churchill argued that it was not in the Allies' interest to press ahead with it until they could bring to bear the full weight of their military power on the Germans. He wrote: "I feel that Premier Stalin would have grave reasons to complain if our land offensive against Germany and Italy in 1943 were reduced to the scale of about 13 divisions instead of 50 which have been mentioned to him. I feel that our offensive war plans for 1943 are on altogether a too small a scale compared with the resources and power of Britain and the United States".²²⁸ Churchill applauded the defeats that the German military had suffered in Russia but he concluded that "no important transfers of German troops can be made in 1943 from the Eastern to the Western theatre".²²⁹

Churchill calculated that the 31 Allied divisions stationed throughout the Mediterranean had forced the Germans to withdraw 11 of the 40 divisions stationed in France in order to defend the southern coastlines and another 4 to 6 would be required to garrison the Italian Peninsula, Sicily and Sardinia. This, according to Churchill, was the return on Torch and that "none of these facts were present when 'Round-Up and 'Sledgehammer' were considered at the London Conferences of July".²³⁰ His assessment was that "it should be assumed that the North African shore is adequately equipped with Air Forces and that the Mediterranean is open for military traffic by the end of March, thus securing a substantial relief in shipping: that any "Brimstone" operations are concluded by the beginning of June: that all landing craft needed for Round-Up should be back in Great Britain by the end of June; that July should be devoted to preparation and rehearsal; and that August or, if the weather is adverse, September should be taken as the striking target".²³¹ However, such inconsistency of Churchill's strategic preference frustrated Brooke who constantly tried to rein in the Prime Minister's operational schemes. With Churchill's gaze cast upon the Channel once again, Brooke complained in his journal that "COS meeting at which we were faced with a new paper written by the PM again swinging back towards a Western front during 1943!! After

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

having repeatedly said that North Africa must act as a 'springboard' and not as a 'sofa' to future action! After urging attacks on Sardinia and Sicily he is now swinging away from these for a possible invasion of France in 1943!"²³² Brooke's second entry for the day recorded: "In the evening, 5.30pm meeting of COS with PM, Attlee, Eden, Leathers. Long harangue by the PM that army must in 1943 fight German army! However, after proving to him small forces that might be available, inclined to agree that we might perhaps do more in the Mediterranean, unless there are signs of great weakness in Germany".²³³

Churchill's supposed pledge to Stalin that a Second Front would open in 1943 compounded the difficulty Brooke had in deterring the Prime Minister from this course of action. Brooke contested that such a promise had been made, to which he claimed Churchill replied that it had occurred on the last evening of his visit to Moscow earlier in the year when saying goodbye to Stalin and out of earshot of anyone else.²³⁴ On 9 December, Brooke documented that "Clark Kerr, Ambassador in Moscow, came to see me this evening and I had a long talk with him. He corroborates all my worst fears, namely that we are going to have great difficulties in getting out of Winston's promise to Stalin, namely the establishment of a Western front in 1943! Stalin seems to be banking on it, and Clark Kerr fears a possible peace between Hitler and Stalin if we disappoint the latter".²³⁵ Brooke did not put much store in the idea of a truce between Germany and the Soviet Union given the Red Army's advances, the depletion of Germany's resources that this entailed and Stalin's desire for the incorporation of the Baltic countries into the Soviet Union. He concluded: "I therefore feel that the danger of a peace between Russia and Germany is mainly useful propaganda from either side to secure their own ends".²³⁶

Brooke's suspicion of the Soviet Union was coupled with his distaste for Churchill's European ambitions and his undertaking to champion the Mediterranean strategy. His diary entry for the 15th noted: "We finished off our paper refuting PM's argument for a Western front in France and pressing for a

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Alanbrooke, 3 December 1942. 345-346.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid. 346.

²³⁵ Ibid. 347.

Mediterranean policy aiming at pushing Italy out of the war and Turkey into it. By these means we are relieving the maximum possible pressure off Russia. Clark Kerr, the Ambassador in Moscow, gave us an hour on his views of Stalin's reactions if we do not start a Western front in France. He argued that such a course might well lead Stalin into making a separate peace with Hitler. I refuse to believe such a thing is possible, and fail to see how any common agreement could ever be arrived at between them which would not irreparably lower the prestige of one or the other in the eyes of their own people".²³⁷ The following day he returned to these themes once again and the need to convince Churchill that the Mediterranean offered the best chance of defeating the Axis and drawing pressure away from the Soviet Union: "At 6pm we had a COS meeting with PM. Anthony Eden also there. All about policy for 1943. As the paper we put in went straight against Winston, who was pressing for a Western front in France, whilst we pressed for amphibious operations in the Mediterranean, I feared the worst!! However, meeting went well from the start and I succeeded in swinging him round. I think he is now fairly safe, but I still have the Americans to convince first, and then Stalin next".²³⁸

Brooke again argued strongly against Bolero and Round-Up at a meeting of the War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee on that same day, and claimed that the success of Bolero was subject to the capacity of the ports, railways and bases in the United Kingdom to host US formations. He contended that once Round-Up was underway, the intake of US forces into Britain would fall to one division a month as men and equipment moved out of the country as well as in and argued that the Germans could counter this by transferring their divisions from the East to West through the excellent rail systems on the Continent. The system running along North-South lines through Greece and Italy was not as advanced and was vulnerable to Allied attack. Brooke asserted that a simultaneous operation under which the Western Allies entered Europe and knocked Italy out of the war would be more appealing to

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid. 348.

²³⁸ Ibid. 16 December 1942. 349.

the Russians than if everything rested upon Round-Up. In his mind, Round-Up could not offer any relief to the Russians until August at the earliest.²³⁹

If the British expressed doubt about the Second Front in their previous reports and communications when the War Cabinet C.O.S. Committee reconvened on 31 December they were openly critical. Churchill may still have been wavering towards Round-Up but on the eve of 1943 Brooke, Pound and Portal continued to petition that it was not possible for the Western Allies to deploy forces to North-West Europe. Although it was necessary to occupy Germany in order to achieve victory, "north-west Europe may be likened to a powerful fortress which can be assaulted only after adequate preparation. To make a fruitless assault before the time was ripe would be disastrous for ourselves, of no assistance to Russia, and devastating to the morale of occupied Europe. We cannot yet bring ourselves to bear sufficient forces to overcome the German garrison of France and the Low Countries, which can rapidly concentrate against us in superior strength and powerful coast defences".²⁴⁰ Any assault on Europe must take place before September to allow for the weather conditions but in their estimations, the strongest force that the Allies could have mustered consisted of 13 British and 9 US divisions.

The C.O.S. argued that if the Allies gave a higher priority to transporting US forces across the Atlantic and a larger proportion of Army support aircraft then this would be to the detriment of the bomber offensive against the European Axis powers. Forces allocated to Bolero would require amphibious operations in the Mediterranean to be halted and this would allow Germany the opportunity to rest and re-equip its forces and Italy would be granted time to recover its faltering morale. Again, the High Command pressed for the attrition of Germany rather than a direct assault; a process that they claimed would undermine the industrial and economic base of the Reich and its sources for replenishing its submarine and air fleets as well as the self-confidence of the citizens. If Italy could be detached from the Axis then the Allies could induce Turkey into the war on their side. It was the opinion of the

²³⁹ War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Minutes of Staff Conference held on Wednesday, 16th December, 1942, at 6.15p.m.* C.O.S. (42) 198th Meeting (0). PREM3/499/7. Present at this meeting were Churchill, Eden, Brooke, Pound, Portal, Ismay and Mountbatten. Brigadier L.C. Hollis and Lieutenant-Colonel C.R. Price served as the Secretariat.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

British High Command that the Allies needed to follow up Torch with an invasion of Italy as that was where the momentum was and without such an operation, the Axis would have allowed time to recuperate.

The year 1942 was a decisive twelve months in the course of the Second World War and British and Allied planning towards the Second Front. The debate and manoeuvring that surrounded the Marshall Plan continued throughout the year yet the culmination of the Western Allied discourse was the launching of Torch. The commitment of British and American divisions to this offensive drew resources away from the Bolero programme and this in turn, meant that if Sledgehammer had proceeded then Britain would have provided the bulk of the formation that would have crossed the Channel. This chapter has illustrated that the British could not accept this and as a result, the Allies abandoned the possibility that the Second Front could have opened in 1942. Although the Western Allies embarked upon operations throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East, Round-Up's fate had not been finally determined. Marshall, in particular, remained committed to the Second Front and with the Anglo-American forces clearing the North African coast, Churchill, Roosevelt and their Chiefs of Staff planned to meet to determine strategy and plans. They chose Casablanca as the location. Nevertheless, as the Allied leaders and military commanders prepared to meet, it appeared that Britain's attitude towards the Second Front had prevailed within the Allies' strategic planning on the eve of 1943.

CHAPTER FOUR.

From Casablanca to Teheran: The Compromise of 1943.

"It seems to me that it would be a most grievous decision to abandon ROUND-Up. TORCH is no substitute for ROUND-UP and only engages 13 divisions as against the 48 contemplated for ROUND-UP. All my talks with Stalin in Averill's presence were on the basis of a postponed ROUND-UP. But never was it suggested that we should attempt no Second Front in Europe in 1943 or even 1944".

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt. 24 November 1942.

Casablanca.

The Casablanca Conference opened amidst the changing landscape of the Second World War. As American and British forces fought for control of the North African coastline, the Axis nations suffered reversals on the battlefields of the Western Pacific and the Soviet Union. The purpose of the summit, which was an Anglo-American affair,²⁴¹ was to further determine a joint strategy for the future of the war²⁴² with Roosevelt and Churchill travelling to Morocco along with their Chiefs of Staff and close political advisors.²⁴³ Although they had committed forces to Torch at the expense of the Bolero programme, the Americans failed to share the British enthusiasm for the Mediterranean Strategy. Farrell's explanation of this divergence between the allies on the eve of the conference is that "The questions of what was decided at Casablanca and the impact of these decisions are approached primarily from the perspective of the efforts of British and US military staffs to reshape

²⁴¹ Overtures were extended to Stalin in the previous months, as Roosevelt was keen for Stalin to be involved lest he looked upon the conference as the western Allies forming policy without consultation with Moscow. However, the Soviet leader opted to remain in Moscow at a time of uncertainty as to the outcome of the Battle of Stalingrad.

²⁴² Farrell's analysis of this point is that the conference, "encompasses not only the question of balancing current and proposed campaigns against the Axis powers, but also a more fundamental point: what was to be the basic grand strategic approach in preparing and then executing the ultimate offensives? By January 1943, this question was a chronic point of contention in the Allied central direction of the war". Brian P. Farrell. 'Symbol of Paradox: the Casablanca Conference, 1943'. Canadian Journal of History. April 1993, Vol. 28, No. 1. Sourced Electronically so Page Numbers not Available.

²⁴³ It was at Roosevelt's behest that Hull and Eden did not attend.

grand strategy”.²⁴⁴ In his opinion, the reason for this was that “Different vested interests remained operative. The men who directed the war from the centre in the United Kingdom and the United States operated with very different perceptions of their respective margins of power. Despite their growing abundance of material, the Allies faced awkward shortages of several essential items. These factors virtually dictated that at each crossroad of events a conference of principals was necessary, in order to attempt to re-orient Allied grand strategy to new conditions and restore consensus”.²⁴⁵

While King sought to have thirty percent of all Allied resources transferred into the Pacific and Arnold spoke of the benefit to the air forces in acquiring bases throughout the Mediterranean from which they could strike at Germany and the Romanian oil fields, Marshall remained adamant that all theatres of operation were subsidiary to North-West Europe.²⁴⁶ Yet whatever the fault lines running through the US command, there was agreement within the American delegation that the Mediterranean must not take precedence over Europe. Farrell explains that “The J.C.S. failed to forge a firm US consensus position to bring to the conference. All agreed that shipping shortages would limit global options. They also agreed that British proposals to expand operations farther into the Mediterranean would drain forces into a subsidiary theatre and prevent what they all desired – the concentration of allied power in the UK for a grand strategic offensive, with US forces predominant. Many in the War Department viewed the new British outline proposal as a deliberate attempt to conserve British power and foster British influence at the expense of a more rapid turn to the ultimate offensive”.²⁴⁷

For the British, it was important to their interests that the Mediterranean remained central to the Allied plan and that their forces were predominant there in relation to the other Allied states if they were to remain an equal partner in the trans-Atlantic Alliance and be assured of continued

²⁴⁴ Farrell. *Canadian Journal of History*. Sourced Electronically so Page Numbers not Available.

²⁴⁵ *ibid*

²⁴⁶ As an incentive to the British to support his point of view, he proposed that command of any cross-Channel operation in 1943 rest with one of their officers however, without firm support from Roosevelt, the general's position was not one of strength and he was reluctant to throw his weight behind any of the alternatives proposed by his colleagues.

²⁴⁷ Farrell. *Canadian Journal of History*. Sourced Electronically so Page Numbers not Available.

representation on the highest political and military councils. Churchill referred to this and the differing priorities of the American commanders in a telegram to Attlee and the War Cabinet on 17 January. In this communication, he wrote that "The Chiefs of Staff have been in session two or three times each day either alone or with their American Colleagues. The whole field of the war is being surveyed theatre by theatre. Admiral King of course considers that the Pacific should be a first charge on all resources and both the American Army and Navy are very keen on more vigorous action in Burma to help China culminating in a large-scale ANAKIM later in the year. General Marshall is also keen on this, but otherwise his emphasis seemed to lie towards building on ROUND-UP or SLEDGEHAMMER at the expense of the Mediterranean".²⁴⁸ He went on to make the point that "So great a reinforcement of British troops and our numbers would evidently justify increased representation for us in the High Command".²⁴⁹

In the opening sessions of the conference, Brooke presented the case that German operations against the Allied lines of communication and supply throughout the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean posed the gravest threat and the lack of shipping resources compounded this problem. Howard writes that the C.I.G.S. argued that the Germans "were no longer attacking. They were on the defensive both in Russia and in North Africa; their allies were faltering, their manpower was failing, and they were growing short of oil. As a result, victory in Europe in 1943 was by no means impossible".²⁵⁰ Even so, the phrase 'victory in Europe in 1943' did not correspond to an assault on the Continent's northwestern seaboard. Instead, Brooke's support for possible amphibious landings rested upon his belief that to be successful any landings needed to take place at points where the enemy was most vulnerable and at their weakest rather than the area where it was most suitable for the Allies to concentrate their forces. Using Germany's excellent east-west communications as the basis for his argument, Brooke proposed that the German forces would be overstretched throughout the Mediterranean, have

²⁴⁸ *Telegram from Winston S. Churchill to Clement Attlee and War Cabinet via HMS Bulolo and Admiralty. Strategem No. 56. Paragraph 1. 17 January, 1943. PREM 3/420/3.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid. Paragraph 4.*

²⁵⁰ Michael Howard. *Grand Strategy. Volume IV, August 1942 – September 1943.* (London, H.M.S.O. 1972). 245.

more difficulties with reinforcement and supply given the terrain around the Italian Alps and would remain uncertain as to where the Allied forces would land.

Throughout his diary entries for this period, Brooke portrayed himself as a man trying to make those around him understand the merits of the British strategic viewpoint and these recordings show that his low opinion of Marshall as a commanding officer had not diminished. On 16 January, he recorded that "From 10.30 to 1pm Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting at which I had again to put forward all the advantages of our proposed Mediterranean [strategy] and counter arguments in favour of a French front plan. It is a slow and tiring business which requires a lot of patience. They cannot be pushed and hurried, and must be made gradually to assimilate our proposed policy".²⁵¹ His account for the following day indicated that his patience was wearing thin. "A desperate day! We are further from obtaining agreement than we ever were! Started Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting to be told by Marshall that there was disagreement between the Joint Planners on the question of Burma. Then a long harangue again on the question of the Pacific from Marshall, and finally questions about Iceland!! Decided that it was useless going on conferring until the Joint Planners had made more headway. Had a meeting between Chiefs of Staff and our Joint Planners when we found that the main difficulty rested with the fact that the USA Joint Planners did not agree with Germany being the primary enemy and were wishing to defeat Japan first!!! We have therefore prepared a new paper for discussion tomorrow at which we must get this basic principle settled".²⁵²

The difficulty in achieving a settlement regarding the basic strategic principles was due to the suspicion that each side had of the other and their failure to see their counterpart's point of view. While the British were concerned that the United States would place their emphasis on the Pacific at the expense of 'Germany First', the Americans regarded Britain's intentions to expand the Mediterranean operations as merely a device to conserve their power and believed that the British were not interested in deploying forces to

²⁵¹ Alanbrooke. 16 January 1942. 360.

²⁵² Ibid. 17 January 1942. 361.

the Pacific once Germany had been defeated. Marshall did not want to see the enlargement of operations throughout the Mediterranean from which the Allies could not easily extract their forces but at the same time, he did not wish to see large American formations sitting idle in the UK waiting for a crack in German morale before crossing the English Channel. In this sense, he supported transferring resources to the Pacific where the Allies could actively utilise their forces and not merely hold a defensive perimeter that enabled the Japanese to consolidate their positions throughout the Greater Co-Prosperity Sphere.

The United States and Britain concluded an agreement on 18 January after arduous and sometimes acrimonious negotiations. In his diary passage for that day, Brooke wrote: "We met again at 3pm and I produced the paper which was accepted with few alterations!!! I could hardly believe our luck. Shortly afterwards we were informed that the President would hold a full meeting with the PM all Combined Chiefs of Staff to hear results we had reached. We met at his villa at 5.30pm. I was asked to sit next to him, and he asked me who had been acting as our Chairman and I told him that Marshall had been invited by us to perform that function. He then called on Marshall, who at once called on me to expound the results of our meetings. It was a difficult moment, we had only just succeeded in getting the American Chiefs of Staff to agree with us. However the statement went all right, was approved by the Americans and by the President and PM, receiving full blessing. So we have reached some results after all".²⁵³ The 'results' referred to in this extract was an arrangement designed to placate and satisfy the demands of all concerned. Dunn's assessment of this outcome is that "Roosevelt and Churchill opted at Casablanca for a do-little or nothing strategy in 1943. The Mediterranean strategy projected only the conquest of Sicily, and then the situation was to be reviewed again. The hope was that Germany would collapse under the stress of the battle in Russia and the Allied air raids".²⁵⁴

The Casablanca agreement was a double-edged sword for British. On the one hand, the Combined Chiefs stated in a memorandum outlining the summit's conclusions, that "Operations in the European theatre will be

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. 35.

conducted with the object of defeating Germany in 1943 with the maximum forces that can be brought to bear upon her by the United Nations".²⁵⁵ However, there was no direct reference to the Second Front. Instead, there was reference to "the main lines of offensive action"²⁵⁶ that included the invasion of Sicily, intensifying pressure on Italy and enlisting Turkey as an ally.²⁵⁷ Offensive action based in the United Kingdom would involve the heavy aerial bombing of the Reich along with the launching of amphibious operations. In terms of a possible implementation of Round-Up, the memorandum stated that the strongest possible force must be ready to deploy to the Continent. However, with this came the qualification: "as soon as German resistance is weakened to the required extent".^{258 259}

Contained within these conclusions was the stipulation that operations throughout all theatres would continue but only with the forces that the Allies had already allocated. This meant that although Husky²⁶⁰ would eventually widen to incorporate the Italian Mainland, there would be no further troop movements into the Mediterranean. Hence, there would be no further campaigns in the Balkans, the Iberian Peninsula or elsewhere in the region. Thus, the Allies had taken the first step towards ensuring that the Second Front become ascendant to the Mediterranean strategy, something that Marshall had campaigned since the United States' entry into the war. However, in January 1943, the Mediterranean remained the principal area of operations for US and British forces and these proposals formed the basis for the Conference's final report that the Combined Chiefs of Staff presented to Roosevelt and Churchill four days later.²⁶¹

²⁵⁵ Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Conduct of the War in 1943: Memorandum by the Combined Chiefs of Staff*. C.C.S. 155/1. 19 January 1943. PREM 3/420/5.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Churchill conveyed the contents of this report to Attlee and the War Cabinet that same day. In telegram, the Prime Minister stated that the Chiefs of Staff had agreed upon Husky and that although Bolero was to proceed it would do so as far as Allied resources allowed it to and that any return to the Continent would be possible if the Germans showed signs of collapse. Churchill also spoke of the guarantee that had given to the Americans that Britain would not withdraw from the conflict following the defeat of Germany. *Telegram from Winston S. Churchill to Clement Attlee and War Cabinet via HMS Bulolo and Admiralty*. Strategem No. 98. 19 January, 1943. PREM 3/420/5.

²⁶⁰ Operation Husky was the codename for the Allied invasion of Italy.

²⁶¹ Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Final Report to the President and the Prime Minister - Symbol - Summarising Decisions by the Combined Chiefs of Staff*. C.C.S. 170/2, 23 January 1943.

Stalin's Reaction to the Casablanca Conference.

The Soviet Government and its leader had monitored the proceedings and outcomes of the Casablanca Conference. Stalin had declined Roosevelt's invitation to attend the summit a month earlier citing the situation on the Eastern Front²⁶² however, in keeping with his wishes to remain informed of developments, Roosevelt and Churchill communicated the conclusions to him in a joint communiqué on 25 January. The two leaders claimed to be committed to a cross-Channel enterprise: "we are in no doubt that our correct strategy is to concentrate on the defeat of Germany, with a view to achieving early and decisive victory in the European theatre".²⁶³ What they omitted was a commitment to a particular point of entry to the Continent for their forces as well as a possible timetable. Instead, they signalled their intention to expand the US and British commitment throughout the Mediterranean through the launching of large-scale amphibious operations as well as increasing the number of US forces based in the United Kingdom. Roosevelt and Churchill argued that these forces, when combined with their British counterparts, "will prepare themselves to re-enter the Continent of Europe as soon as practicable. These concentrations will certainly be known to our enemies, but they will not know where or when, or on what scale we propose to strike. They will therefore be compelled to divert both land and air forces to all the shores of France, the Low Countries, Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, the heel of Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, Crete and the Dodecanese".²⁶⁴

Churchill was aware of Stalin's reaction to the outcome of the conference and the communiqué that contributed nothing towards opening the Second Front nor demonstrated that the Western Allies had decided upon a decisive

²⁶² Roosevelt forwarded Stalin's reply to the Casablanca invitation to Churchill on December 17, 1942. Stalin claimed that the situation at the front prevented him from leaving Moscow at that time and in regard to the Second Front wrote, "allow me to express my confidence that the time is not being lost and that the promises about the opening of a second front in Europe given by you Mr. President and by Mr. Churchill in regard to 1942 and in any case in regard to the spring of 1943 will be fulfilled, and that a second front in Europe will be actually opened by the joint forces of Great Britain and the United States in the spring of next year". Prime Minister's Personal Telegram. Serial No. T 1726/2. 17 December 1942. PREM 3/333/11.

²⁶³ Prime Minister to Foreign Secretary. Stratagem No. 204. *Forward of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill to Premier Stalin*. Stratagem 255, 25 January 1943. PREM3/333/3.

strategy. On the 26th, Churchill warned Attlee, Eden and the War Cabinet “Nothing in the world will be accepted by Stalin as an alternative to our placing 50 to 60 divisions in France by the Spring of this year. I think he will be disappointed and furious with the joint message. Therefore, I thought it wise that the President and I should both stand together. After all, our backs are broad”.²⁶⁵ Stalin’s immediate response was couched in a friendly tone; nevertheless he was prepared to press the issue of the Second Front and seek clarity amidst the ambiguity of Roosevelt and Churchill’s initial report. Stalin expressed his gratitude for the report on the summit yet wrote: “Taking your decisions with regard to Germany as setting the task to smash her in 1943 by the way of a second front in Europe, I would be grateful to you for telling me what concrete operations and at what time are envisaged”.²⁶⁶

Grigg claims that throughout the Casablanca Conference, Churchill appeared on easy terms with the President yet he noted “appearances are deceptive. In retrospect we can see that at Casablanca Churchill’s control of events was slipping. TORCH had been his personal triumph, It was his idea and he had imposed it upon the Americans and his own advisors. But now he was ceasing to be the architect of Allied strategy. At Casablanca the strategic design agreed to was Brooke’s rather than his. And if he could no longer dominate the British C.I.G.S., still less could he dominate the President of the United States”.²⁶⁷ Churchill had wanted to inform Stalin that following the offensive in Tunisia, the US and Britain would seek to force Italy out of the war, but the President refused to concur. He suggested altering the wording to omit any reference to a possible assault on Italy itself. He wrote that the Western Alliance inform Stalin that “we intend in July, or earlier if possible, to seize Sicily with the object of clearing the Mediterranean, promoting Italian collapse with the consequent effort on Greece and Yugoslavia, and wearing down the German air force; this to be closely followed by an operation in the

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ *Prime Minister to Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and War Cabinet via Air Ministry Special Signal Office. Stratagem No. 255. 26 January 1943. PREM3/333/3.*

²⁶⁶ *Telegram from Premier Stalin to President Roosevelt and Premier Churchill. Forwarded to Churchill by Foreign Secretary via Soviet Embassy and Air Ministry. Stratagem No. 224, Telescope No. 364, 30 January 1943. PREM3/333/3.*

²⁶⁷ Grigg. 1943: *The Victory That Never Was*. 78.

Eastern Mediterranean, probably against the Dodecanese”.²⁶⁸ Roosevelt also insisted that the telegram include a pledge to build-up forces for a cross-Channel invasion in August. He did concede that the availability of landing craft and shipping would be a factor in the operation proceeding, along with the weather. However, if these impediments arose then the operation would be deferred to September. Both of these stipulations were included in the final draft transmitted to Moscow on 9 February.

Stalin’s reaction on 16 February signalled his growing discontent with the outcome of the Casablanca Conference and the ensuing US and British strategy. In this message, he argued that in his opinion, the ongoing operations in Tunisia allowed the Germans to transfer forces to the Soviet front rather than the stated intention of the Western Allies to divert them in the opposite direction. He again urged London and Washington to cross the English Channel if they were to deny the Germans the opportunity of rebuilding their forces and stressed that “It is evident from your message also that the establishment of the second front, in particular in France, is envisaged only in August-September. It seems to me that the present situation demands the greatest possible speeding up of the action contemplated, i.e. of the opening of the second front in the West at a considerably earlier date than indicated. In order not to give the enemy any respite it is extremely important to deliver the blow from the west in the spring or in the early summer and not to postpone it until the second half of the year”.²⁶⁹

Churchill immediately cabled Washington on 4 March imploring Roosevelt that “We think it important here that we should keep together”.²⁷⁰ His next step was to provide Stalin with a detailed account of the Western Alliance’s war situation at that time in another attempt to demonstrate why their commitments throughout various theatres prevented any immediate cross-Channel enterprise from taking place. Churchill dispatched this telegram on Roosevelt’s behalf and argued that “The Anglo-American attempt to get Tunis

²⁶⁸ President Roosevelt to the Prime Minister. Telegram. No. 256, 5 February 1943. PREM3/333/3.

²⁶⁹ Premier Stalin to Premier Churchill. *Prime Minister’s Personal Telegram*. Serial No. T/192/3, 16 February 1943, PREM3/333/3.

and Bizerta at a run was abandoned in December because of the strength of the enemy, the impending rainy season, the already sodden character of the ground and the fact that communications stretched 500 miles from Algiers and 160 miles from Bone through bad roads and a week of travelling over single-track French railways".²⁷¹ Churchill also claimed that the weather had caused delays in the Allies' logistical system and that there were over 400,000 German troops, along with additional Italian forces, confronting their forces. He disclosed that the Allies had, "suffered some sharp local reverses towards the end of last month",²⁷² and that it would be the 19th of that month before Montgomery's forces could resume their forward push.

It was in this telegram that Churchill admitted that there would be no Second Front that year. His reasoning was that the British military estimated that there were 30 German divisions stationed throughout Western Europe at that point in time and fresh units had replaced those that Germany had deployed to Russia. Churchill expounded upon the shortage in shipping resources and that "In order to sustain the operations in North Africa, the Pacific and India, and to carry supplies to Russia, the import programme into the United Kingdom has been cut to the bone, and we have eaten, and are eating, deeply into our reserves. It would be impossible to provide the shipping to bring back any of the forces now in North Africa in time for operations across the Channel this year."²⁷³ Churchill returned to the British theme that a cross-Channel operation would commence should the German forces weaken and concluded: "In the case the enemy should weaken sufficiently we are preparing to strike earlier than August, and plans are kept alive from week to week. If he does not weaken, a premature attack with insufficient forces would merely lead to a bloody repulse and a great triumph for the enemy".²⁷⁴

Stalin did not accept Churchill's explanations nor the ambiguity contained within them. He reiterated that the Western Alliance had pledged to undertake operations in France no later than the spring of 1943 and that any delays in

²⁷⁰ Churchill to Roosevelt. *Prime Minister's Personal Telegram*. Serial No. T/257/3. 4 March, 1943. PREM/3/333/3.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

such action meant that the Red Army faced increased German forces. Stalin concluded that although he recognised the difficulties the Western Alliance faced in mounting a cross-Channel enterprise he was unable to accept that they had placed the Tunisian offensive on hold. He wrote, "I deem it my duty to warn you in the strongest possible manner how dangerous would be from the viewpoint of our common cause further delay in the opening of the second front in France. This is the reason why the uncertainty of your statements concerning the Anglo-American offensive across the Channel arouses grave anxiety in me about which I feel I cannot be silent".²⁷⁵

Maintaining the Status Quo.

Stalin would remain true to his word and continued agitating for the opening of the Second Front throughout the months ahead. However, Britain's strategic planning demonstrated a remarkable amount of resilience to both the Soviet Government's criticism and pressure and the changes in the circumstances of the war. The Combined Chiefs' memorandum and the final report of the Casablanca Conference did not refer to an extension of the Mediterranean strategy to incorporate the Italian mainland. Nevertheless, Martin Gilbert claims that this is exactly what the British had in mind and that the Prime Minister had cast his eye towards an invasion of the Italian mainland, "with the object of preparing the way for a very large-scale offensive on the underbelly of the Axis in 1943."²⁷⁶ Brooke's diary entry, recorded two days prior to the release of the final report, hints that this is what he had in mind despite it not becoming formal policy: "I wanted to ensure that Germany should continue to be regarded as our primary enemy and that the defeat of Japan must come after that of Germany. Secondly that for the present Germany can best be attacked through the medium of Italy in the Mediterranean, and thirdly that this can best be achieved with a policy directly against Sicily. All these points have been secured, and in addition many minor

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Premier Stalin to Premier Churchill. *Prime Minister's Personal Telegram*. Serial No. T/87/3. 15 March 1943. PREM3/333/3.

²⁷⁶ Martin Gilbert. *Churchill: A Life*. (London, Heinemann, 1991). 733.

ones connected with Turkey, command of operations in Tunisia and at home etc. It has been quite the hardest 10 days I have had from the point of view of difficulty of handling the work".²⁷⁷

With an eye firmly cast towards the Italian Peninsula, Churchill issued a personal minute to the C.O.S. Committee on 18 April in which he clearly stated that there was no possibility of any Sledgehammer operation²⁷⁸ taking place that year and that it would be 1944 before Round-Up would commence. Once again, the emphasis was on the lack of progress in the air campaign, the shortfall in shipping and landing craft resources and possible operations in Norway and on the Iberian Peninsula as potential barriers. Even in the face of mounting Soviet pressure, Churchill did not shift his attention away from the idea of diversionary raids and he reiterated his view was that "'JUPITER" must again be considered as a possibility for January 1944, or whatever is the best winter month."²⁷⁹ The minute included a note of caution that "Neither can we exclude the possibility of a German excursion into the Spanish Peninsula, and plans should be brought up-to-date for Anglo-American intervention there on the assumption, now almost certain, that the Spaniards and Portuguese will resist the Germans. The re-arrangement of the forces in Great Britain should be adapted to the above purposes rather than to a "SLEDGEHAMMER" or "ROUNDUP".²⁸⁰

According to Churchill, Britain remained committed to the "gradual building up of "BOLERO" and long-term study for "ROUNDUP" in 1944",²⁸¹ as well as the commencement of an amphibious feint for which the Allied forces stationed in the United Kingdom were to stand ready for. Such low-level operations were a useful tool for the British as they enabled them to demonstrate to the United States and the Soviet Union that they had not abandoned their support for committing forces to Continental operations. At the same time, London could evade having to take such an action while they believed that German morale had not cracked and when they did not believe

²⁷⁷ Alanbrooke. 22 January 1942, 366-367.

²⁷⁸ This denotes an Allied landing in France that would take place for a short period of time and act as a diversionary measure to draw German forces from the Russian Front. Round-Up, as defined in the previous chapter, would have entailed a long term commitment.

²⁷⁹ *Prime Ministers Personal Minute*. Prepared by General Ismay for C.O.S. Committee. Serial No. D.81/3. 18 April 1943. PREM3/333/4.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

that there were sufficient US troops based in the United Kingdom for Round-Up to succeed. The agreement reached at Casablanca called for the use of such a raid designed to draw the Luftwaffe into air combat scheduled for 1 August. However, in a report to the War Cabinet on 30 April, the Chiefs of Staff cast doubt on the viability of such a plan. The Chiefs argued that the landing craft requirement for Operation Husky had mounted beyond original estimations and the result was that “there is no possibility of any substantial cross-Channel operation in the early autumn of 1943 against organised opposition. Only if we were to forgo the exploitation of the Mediterranean after “Husky” should we be able to increase the weight of our cross-Channel strike. Such action, however, would take us into the late autumn, by which time the weather would make operations impracticable”.²⁸² The Chiefs also believed that the Allies needed to maintain the spectre of an invasion in an effort to confuse the Germans and force them to reinforce the Atlantic Wall. Their advice was that the Allies make “considerable and obvious preparations at the embarkation ports and the assembly of large numbers of barges and invasion craft. All this will make a good setting for a feint to produce a substantial air battle, which will bring into play our Metropolitan Air Force and the United States 8th Air Force”.²⁸³

The C.O.S. contended that the American contribution to any Second Front for that year would be small with the limitations on trans-Atlantic shipping and the need for administrative and command systems to be established prior to the arrival of the larger combat formations. They estimated that 120,000 US troops would be landing in the United Kingdom each month for the remainder of the year bringing the number to 600,000 by December thus rendering any earlier operation impractical. They also proposed that the Supreme Commander for all cross-Channel operations should be British²⁸⁴ and that the armed forces stationed in the UK be re-organised for the deception scheme

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Future Strategy: Amphibious Operations from the United Kingdom, 1943-44*. 30 April 1943. C.O.S. (48) 219 (0) (Final). PREM3/333/4.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Alanbrooke wrote in his diaries that Churchill offered him the position of Supreme Commander for invasion of Europe in 1943 on three occasions. 15 June 1943, 7 July 1943, 14 July 1943.

and then streamlined ready for an actual attack. This estimation forced a revision of the Casablanca decisions and the Chiefs' plan included:

- (a) An elaborate camouflage and deception scheme extending over the whole summer with a view to pinning the enemy in the West and keeping alive the expectation of large-scale cross-Channel operations in 1943. This would include at least one amphibious feint with the object of bringing on an air battle employing the Metropolitan Royal Air Force and the United States 8th Air Force.
- (b) A return to the Continent in the event of German disintegration at any time from now onwards with whatever forces may be available at the time.
- (c) A full-scale assault against the Continent in 1944 as early as possible".²⁸⁵

However, the circumstances of the war were shifting against the British. The continued agitation from Moscow combined with Roosevelt's wish to deal with Stalin bilaterally, meant that they not only found themselves being pushed outside of the three-power pact but they could no longer keep pushing the Second Front further into the future so long as they did not feel capable of undertaking the venture. The desire on the part of Marshall and Eisenhower to invade Northwest Europe had not waned inspite of the decisions reached at Casablanca and the determination of Churchill and Brooke to maintain a commitment to the Mediterranean when the British delegation arrived in Washington for the Trident Conference in May. Brooke had not lost his belief in Mediterranean Strategy nor his distaste for the American policy. On 10 May, he wrote: "I do NOT look forward to these meetings in fact I hate the thought of them. They will entail hours of argument, they will pretend to understand, will sign many agreements and ...will continue as at present to devote the bulk of their strength to try and defeat Japan!! In fact, Casablanca will be repeated. It is all so maddening as it is not difficult in this case to see

²⁸⁵ War Cabinet Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Future Strategy: Amphibious Operations from the United Kingdom, 1943-44*. 30 April 1943. C.O.S. (48) 219 (0) (Final). PREM3/333/4.

that unless our united effort is directed to defeat Germany and hold Japan the war may go on indefinitely".²⁸⁶

Britain's objective at this summit was now the elimination of Italy from the war. At a meeting with Roosevelt on 14 May, Churchill claimed that this move "would cause a chill of loneliness over the German people and might even be the beginning of their doom"^{287 288} and once again, Churchill returned to his oft-spoken arguments. He talked of the possibility that the Allies could bring Turkey into their fold, thus allowing them the use of bases on Turkish soil and encouraging local uprisings throughout the Balkans and he claimed that the Allies had yet to solve the problems associated with a Continental assault²⁸⁹ and that all available landing craft had been committed to Husky. He also pointed to the fact that at that time there was only one American division based in the United Kingdom and with Round-Up now scheduled for the following year the most experienced Allied divisions in the Mediterranean would simply sit idle for the next seven to eight months.

In response, Roosevelt expressed his concern that the injection of large armies onto the Italian Peninsula could result in the Allies engaging in a war of attrition that would only serve to aid the Germans and that there needed to be an understanding of what resources would be required if such an operation were undertaken. Roosevelt accepted that neither Sledgehammer nor Round-Up would commence that year but with this came the decree that all surplus forces above those already based in the Mediterranean would be committed to the Bolero programme as had been decided at Casablanca. The President argued that the Allies had discussed plans for the Second Front throughout the past two years but what they required was a plan under which they executed the operation at a certain time without further delay. Yet the President played into the British hands by agreeing at this meeting that the US and British troops stationed in the Mediterranean could not sit idle while

²⁸⁶ Alanbrooke, 10 May 1943. 401.

²⁸⁷ *Minutes of Churchill-Roosevelt Meeting*. 14 May, 1943. Cipher Telegram from Britman Washington to Air Ministry. Pencil No. 81. PREM 3/443/6.

²⁸⁸ The British codenamed their cipher team at the Trident Conference as Britman and routed all communication to the War Cabinet and Brigadier Hollis at the Ministry of Defence through the Air Ministry.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.* The problems included the tidal flow on France's Northwest beaches, the strength of the German defences, the number of German units held in reserve and the efficiency of their communication system.

fighting continued on the Russian front and there had to be an engagement with the Axis forces if for no other reason than to placate Stalin.

Although Britain attained this Presidential concession, the Americans were beginning to stand firm on the issue of the Second Front and this marks the second American decision that would bring about the eventual close of the Mediterranean Strategy. It also meant that the division still loomed between the two sides and Brooke wrote of this chasm in his diary when reflecting on the C.O.S. meeting the following day. Brooke claimed that this was a period in which he slumped into depression, as he believed the fruits of his efforts at Casablanca were being undone and that the Americans failed to realise that the British strategy was to re-enter France but through the Mediterranean. His case was that by re-opening the region to Allied shipping over a million tons could now pass through those waters and it gave the Allies a great deal of strategic flexibility which had been lost in the Axis victories. He argued that by attacking Italy and Sicily the Allies were forcing the Germans to expand their defences of southern Europe and this would absorb a great deal of the German military's resources. Therefore, this offered the best route to the defeat of Germany but Marshall disagreed and once again he pressed for a cross-Channel attack that would finish the war in quicker time.

In a communiqué to Brigadier Hollis, stationed at the Ministry of Defence in London, Brigadier Jacob²⁹⁰ wrote of the "cleavage of opinion of what is meant by ROUND-Up and what the objective of our Mediterranean proposals really is".²⁹¹ Jacob reported that the Americans believed that the British had abandoned Round-Up once they had embarked upon Operation Torch and he reiterated Brooke's view that the Americans believed Round-Up offered the most effective solution of winning the war. He also stated that the United States did not believe that there needed to be any collapse in German morale or fighting capability for the Second Front to commence. This constituted a direct challenge to what had become a fundamental element of Britain's strategy. Jacob wrote that, In fact they go so far as to say that if we had not

²⁹⁰ Jacob's role in the Britman team was to authorise the distribution of telegrams from Washington to London detailing the progress of the talks. Hollis served at the Ministry of Defence.

²⁹¹ *Brigadier Jacob to Brigadier Hollis*. Cipher Telegram from Britman to Air Ministry. 15 May 1943. Pencil no. 97. PREM 3/448/6.

done 'TORCH' we could now be doing 'ROUND-UP'.²⁹² Yet Brooke refused to appreciate this point of view. Any embarkation of the cross-Channel enterprise could result in a defeat for the Allies and the failure of the Americans to support his plan was another example of Marshall's inability to grasp the magnitude of operations and problems connected with a direct attack on the Continent. Brooke deliberated on the American strategy in his diary for 17 May and concluded: "Another very disappointing day. We had long meeting with Combined COS from 10.30 onwards, again discussing 'Global Strategy', which led us nowhere. The trouble is that the American mind likes proceeding from the general to the particular, whilst the problem we have to solve cannot evolve any form of general doctrine until we have carefully examined the particular details of each problem. The background really arises out of King's desire to find every loophole he possibly can to divert troops to the Pacific!"²⁹³

The Trident Conference was a victory for Britain's policy towards the Second Front but a victory that came with restrictions attached. Despite the lingering American suspicion regarding British motives in the Mediterranean²⁹⁴ and an agreement that the Second Front would proceed during the following year, the invasion of Italy would commence first. The Americans, after insisting on no further troop allocations outside of Bolero, conceded the remainder of 1943 to the Mediterranean strategy. On 19 May, Brooke acknowledged this development: "Our conclusions are that we are to prepare some 29 divisions for entry into France early in 1944, and at the same time a continuance of pressure against Italy in the Med. The latter is a triumph as Americans wanted to close down all operations in Med after capture of Sicily'.²⁹⁵ ²⁹⁶ Churchill's thinking was of a similar vein. In a telegram to London

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Alanbrooke. 17 May 1943. 405.

²⁹⁴ In his entry for the previous day, Brooke wrote of the American belief that the British were being less than forthcoming with their strategic intentions. He wrote that, "It is quite apparent now that we are a long way apart. What is more the Americans are now taking up the attitude that we led them down the garden path taking them to North Africa! That at Casablanca we again misled them by inducing them to attack Sicily!! And now they are not going to be led astray again". Alanbrooke, 18 May 1943. 405.

²⁹⁵ Ibid. 19 May 1943. 407.

²⁹⁶ Brooke also gave vent to his frustrations over the numerous opinions that the Allied commanders and leaders held regarding strategy. On May 21st, he wrote, "Our difficulties still depended on our different outlook as regards the Pacific. I still feel that we may write a lot on

on 21 May he wrote that "there was yesterday reached an almost complete agreement on the series of questions – HUSKY, POST HUSKY, and BOLERO, SLEDGEHAMMER and ROUNDUP, the essence of which is that we have a free hand in the Mediterranean till November and that thereafter we concentrate on a combination of SLEDGEHAMMER and ROUNDUP which will be called ROUNDHAMMER, by May first".²⁹⁷ However, despite the sentiments that their strategy had once again prevailed, time was no longer on Britain's side. When the Anglo-American forum shifted to Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers the following month,²⁹⁸ the Americans took with them their determination that the Allies would open the Second Front without further deferrals. At the first meeting on 29 May,²⁹⁹ Eisenhower claimed that if the Allies gained control of the air then 50 divisions could effectively hold 75 German divisions in check. Nevertheless, his arguments and those of Marshall that only five divisions would be required in an initial assault wave met the continued British insistence that the Western Alliance needed to divert the Germans from Russia and engage them at several points along Europe's Mediterranean fringe. Brooke continued to stress that in his opinion only the

paper but that it still has little influence on our basic outlooks which may be classified as under:

King still thinks the war can only be won by action in the Pacific at the expense of all other fronts.

Marshall considers that our solution lies in a cross Channel operation with some 20 to 30 divisions, irrespective of the situation on the Russian front, with which he proposes to clear Europe and win the war.

Portal considers that success lies in accumulating the largest air force possible in England and that then, and only then success lies assured through the bombing of Europe.

Dudley Pound on the other hand is obsessed with the anti-U boat warfare and considers that success can only be secured by the defeat of this menace.

AFB [Alanbrooke] considers that success can only be secured by pressing operations in the Mediterranean to force a dispersal of German forces, help Russia, and thus eventually produce a situation where cross channel operations are possible.

And Winston??? Thinks one thing at one moment and another at another moment. At times the war may be won by bombing and all must be sacrificed to it. At others it becomes essential for us to bleed ourselves dry on the Continent because Russia is doing the same. At others our main effort must be in the Mediterranean, directed against Italy or Balkans alternatively, with sporadic desires to invade Norway and 'roll up the map in the opposite direction to Hitler'. But more often than that all he wants to carry out ALL operations simultaneously irrespective of shortages of shipping!"

²⁹⁷ *Prime Minister to Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary – Most Secret and Personal*. 21 May 1943. Cipher Telegram from Britman Washington to Air Ministry. Pencil No. 165. PREM 3/443/6.

²⁹⁸ Churchill and Brooke attended these meetings along with Cunningham and Alexander, Britain's two senior commanders in the Mediterranean. Although Marshall and Eisenhower attended, Roosevelt did not.

²⁹⁹ War Cabinet: Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Record of Meetings held in North Africa Between 29th May and 3rd June 1943*. C.O.S. (43) 290 (0). 5 June 1943. PREM 3/448/9.

Russians could break the Germans on land at that point in time and the best strategy open to the Western Allies was diversion rather than concentration. Churchill was more receptive to the American point of view than his Chief of Imperial General Staff and he declared that he was committed to the May 1944 deadline. The Prime Minister estimated that by 1 May 1944 the US and Britain would have 29 divisions assembled in the United Kingdom and it was his opinion that Allied air forces would be at their most effective over northern France. The minutes from this meeting recorded that "The Prime Minister emphasised that both the British people and the British Army were anxious to fight across the Channel"³⁰⁰ yet the Algiers meetings concluded that, following Husky, the Allied forces in the Mediterranean basin would move onto the Italian mainland. This was the consequence of the Americans conceding 1943 to the Mediterranean and even though there was a commitment to Overlord, that theatre would remain at the forefront of the Western Allies' strategy until June 1944.

In the wake of the Washington and Algiers rounds of talks, the British established Overlord as their primary operation against the Axis for 1943-44. However, even at this stage of the conflict they still looked to force a disintegration of the German economic and industrial capabilities as a possible pre-requisite to an attack and having given his agreement to the Americans, Churchill expressed his doubts as to whether Overlord would succeed and called for Jupiter to be considered even as late as July. The disintegration of Germany's military and industrial base was codenamed 'Pointblank'. It called for the "progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial and economic system, the disruption of vital lines of communication, and the material reduction of German air combat strength by the successful prosecution of the Combined Bomber Offensive is a prerequisite to OVERLORD (barring an independent and complete Russian victory before OVERLORD can be mounted). This operation must therefore continue to have highest strategic priority".³⁰¹ In a report issued to Churchill on 18 August, the Combined Chiefs of Staff acknowledged that the Allies would

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Strategic Concept for the Defeat of the Axis in Europe. Note by the Secretaries*. C.C.S. 303/3. 17 August 1943. PREM3/333/15.

have to allocate resources to Overlord at the expense of the Mediterranean: "As between operation OVERLORD and operations in the Mediterranean, where there is shortage of resources, available resources will be distributed and employed with the main object of ensuring the success of OVERLORD. Operations in the Mediterranean theatre will be carried out with the forces allotted at Trident except insofar as these may be varied by decision of the Combined Chiefs of Staff".³⁰² Whatever reservations the British still held concerning Overlord's potential for success, this acceptance of its primary status was a major strategic concession on their part and it demonstrates that the United States' policy was ascending within the trans-Atlantic alliance. Marshall's two-year drive for a direct attack on the north-west beaches of France would finally be realised and although the Allied forces would soon be fighting northwards along the Italian peninsula, the forces used in this theatre would not encroach on the accelerated Bolero programme. Britain's strategic approach to the war was now deferential to the American policies and demands.

The ill Wind from the East.

Whatever firm decisions the United States and Britain had taken, their actions failed to find favour in Moscow. On 11 June, the Soviet Premier sent a telegram to Roosevelt and Churchill in which he again accused them of going back on the pledge they had made the previous February that a cross-Channel assault would commence in 1943. Stalin wrote that the postponement "creates quite exceptional difficulties for the Soviet Union, which has been waging war for already two years under the greatest strain against the main forces of Germany and her satellites".³⁰³ Stalin made no secret of his belief or threat, depending upon one's interpretation, that the postponement of the Second Front would have a damaging effect on Moscow's relationship with the Western Allies throughout the remainder of the war. He asked whether he should explain "what a painful impression this new

³⁰² Ibid.

postponement of the second front will make on the people and the army of the Soviet Union”³⁰⁴ and Stalin criticised the Western Alliance on the grounds that Moscow was not consulted on this matter.

Churchill again conferred with Roosevelt before formulating a response. In a telegram to the President the following day, the Prime Minister claimed that Stalin’s displeasure was not unexpected and that “in my opinion the best answer will be to knock Italy out of the war and let him know the relief which will come to him thereby. I quite understand their vexation, though they cannot understand the facts that dominate our action”.³⁰⁵ Churchill also detected the threat contained within Stalin’s communication. His explanation to Roosevelt was that Stalin’s anger centred on the lack of consultation between them and Moscow regarding any planning for future conferences. However, Churchill was afraid that the British would remain outside of any dialogue between the Allied powers. He implored Roosevelt to keep him informed of all developments and correspondence and wrote that “all this makes me anxious to know anything you care to tell me about your letter sent to him by Mr. Davis and the answer which has been received from him”.³⁰⁶ In his efforts to remain firmly within the circle of the three-power arrangement, Churchill offered to travel anywhere for a conference.³⁰⁷

The pressure that Stalin exerted upon Churchill and Roosevelt increased with a telegram sent by Sir Alexander Clark Kerr, the British Ambassador to Moscow to Churchill on 14 June. Clark Kerr was blunt in his warnings over the impression that the postponement would make within the Soviet Union, the importance of not discarding Stalin’s opinion or his possible actions and cautioned that without an attack on Europe from the West, the Red Army would have to bear the burden of engaging the Germans for almost another year. He warned that “It is impossible to foresee what a man as unpredictable as Stalin might be moved to do but his last paragraph seems to me to contain dictum of a kind which we should be unwise to disregard. It is true that we

³⁰³ Prime Minister’s Personal Telegram. *Premier Stalin to Premier Churchill, Personal and Secret*. Serial No. T.792/3. 4 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Prime Minister’s Personal Telegram. *Churchill to Roosevelt, Personal and Secret*. Serial No. T.795/3. 12 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ In this telegram, Churchill implored Roosevelt to consider meeting at Scapa Flow.

could make a case for a reply to his objection that he was not consulted (I mean his absence from Casablanca) but I should not recommend that we should attempt to do so".³⁰⁸ Clark Kerr stated that Stalin could not have left the country at the time of the conference but by remaining in Moscow, Stalin placed the US and Britain in an unenviable position as he wanted things both ways. While he could not travel, he felt that he was excluded from the US-British alliance and decision-making councils. Clark Kerr's solution was to convene a summit as "nothing short of a postponement which cannot but confirm Stalin and his people in their deep-seated belief from which they were just beginning to emerge, that we and the Americans are not really playing fair but are deliberately allowing the Russians to bleed themselves to death".³⁰⁹

In his reply to Clark Kerr, Churchill not only offered justification for the Mediterranean strategy but a denunciation of the hypocrisy in Stalin's demands and reproaches. Churchill argued that any invasion across the Channel would amount to a massacre of the Allied forces and he claimed that it was the Soviets who "destroyed the second front in 1939 and 1940 and stood by watching with complete indifference what looked like our total obliteration as a nation. We have made no reproaches, and we did our best to help them when they were in turn attacked".³¹⁰ Churchill gave full vent to his anger and hostility towards the Soviet Union in this telegram. He warned that there was a limit to his patience and that the Soviet attitude was driven by what he saw as "cold-blooded self-interest and total disdain of our lives and fortunes".³¹¹

Yet Churchill's response to Stalin contained nothing of the harsh rhetoric that characterised his telegram to Clark Kerr. Instead, his tactic was to claim to have understood Stalin's disappointment in his telegram but he wrote that "I am quite sure we are doing not only the right thing but the only thing that is physically possible in the circumstances. It would be no help to Russia if we threw away a hundred thousand men in a disastrous cross-Channel attack such as would, in my opinion, certainly occur if we tried to exploit any success

³⁰⁸ Sir Alexander Clark Kerr. *From Moscow to Foreign Office*. Telegram No. 3928. 14 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ Prime Minister to Sir Alexander Clark Kerr. *Prime Minister's Personal Telegram*. Serial No. T.851/3. 16 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.

that might be gained at very heavy cost.³¹² Churchill argued that the German forces stationed in France posed too formidable an obstacle for an invasion to be successful and that these forward divisions could be reinforced utilising the French railway system as opposed to the Allies who would be using the beaches and destroyed Channel harbours. Churchill stressed that "I cannot see how a great British defeat and slaughter would aid the Soviet armies. It might, however, cause the utmost ill-feeling here if it were thought it had been incurred against the advice of our military experts and under pressure from you. You will remember that I have always made it clear in my telegrams to you that I would never authorise any cross-Channel attack which I believed would lead only to useless massacre. If there was to be victory then the Allies needed to win battles and he used the campaign in Tunisia as an example whereby the Allies had destroyed the Axis forces both in the air and on the ground. The Germans had deployed forces to Italy, the Balkans, the Mediterranean islands and into Vichy France and Churchill claimed that, "It is my earnest and sober hope that we can knock Italy out of the war this year, and by doing so we shall draw far more Germans off your Front than by other means open".³¹³ The conclusion to this telegram contained the suggestion that Stalin joined himself and Roosevelt for a summit as it was Churchill's view that "the need and advantages of a meeting are very great. I can only say that I will go at any risk to any place that you and the President may agree upon."³¹⁴ Once again, Churchill suggested Scapa Flow as a possible venue.

However, Stalin would not be appeased so easily and as a result, the issue of the Second Front developed into a serious point of contention between Moscow and the Western Allies to the point where the Soviet leader accused Churchill and Roosevelt of misleading him concerning both their preparations and intentions to deploy forces across the English Channel. In a cable to London on the 24th, Stalin reminded Churchill of the memorandum that he presented to Molotov in June 1942 in which he informed the Foreign Minister that preparations were underway for a cross-Channel landing that

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Prime Minister to Premier Stalin. *Prime Minister's Personal Telegram*. Serial No. T.852/3. No. 741 to Moscow. 20 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

would commence in 1943 and that they had made similar claims to him in January and February of that year. Stalin argued that the conditions for this enterprise had shifted in favour of the Allies with the US and British navies and air forces now holding a supremacy over the Germans and that the Wehrmacht had suffered serious defeats both in the Mediterranean and along the Russian Front. Moscow would not accept Churchill's argument that the Allies could not afford to lose a hundred thousand men in a British defeat. Stalin demanded to know of the one million men that Churchill had spoken about in earlier communications that he pledged would participate in the landings and if the Western Allies had prepared for crossing the Channel then why was it not a reality. Stalin also made no secret of his view that the Western Allies were not prepared to engage in combat while at the same time allowing the brunt of the fighting to fall on the Red Army: "I must say: here is not simply the question of disappointment on the part of the Soviet Government, here is the question of its confidence in the Allies which is severely tried by the above happenings. One should not forget that on all this depends the possibility to save millions of lives in the occupied territories of Western Europe and Russia and reduce the colossal sacrifices of the Soviet armies in comparison with which the losses of the Anglo-American troops could be considered modest".³¹⁵

Two days later, Churchill attempted to convince Stalin of his reasons for not opening the Second Front once again. This telegram included a reminder that prior to 22 June 1941 the Soviet Union had done nothing to aid Britain when confronted with superior German military power and that the British had commenced their aid shipments immediately following Germany's eastern offensives. Churchill claimed that "the views of our staffs, which I have shared at every stage, have been continually modified by the course of events. In the first place, although all the shipping had been fully occupied, it has not been possible to transport the American Army to Britain according to the programme proposed in June 1942. Whereas it was then hoped that 27 American divisions would be in Great Britain by April 1943, in fact there is

³¹⁵ Premier Stalin to Premier Churchill. *Prime Minister's Personal Telegram. Serial No. T.891/3. 24 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.*

now, in June, 1943, only one, and there will be by August only 5".³¹⁶ Churchill remained insistent that the Mediterranean offered the best alternative to defeating the Germans: "Thus not only on the one hand have the difficulties of the cross-Channel attack continually seemed greater to us and the resources available have not been forthcoming, but a more hopeful and fruitful strategic policy has opened to us in another theatre, and we have the right and duty to act in accordance with our convictions, informing you at every stage of the changes in our views imposed by the vast movement of the war".³¹⁷

In the months leading up to the Teheran Conference, Churchill became preoccupied with the Balkans once again. While Roosevelt sought a bi-lateral meeting with Stalin, Churchill sought one with the President. Kimball believes that the motive behind Churchill's push for an Anglo-American conference was to gain American acquiescence for a Balkan offensive that would thwart growing Soviet influence in the region.³¹⁸ Yet the fate of Overlord and the intended launch date of May 1944 depended upon which policy the Soviet Union supported. If the Soviets supported British operations in the Balkans as a means of relieving German pressure on the Eastern Front then this could mean a further postponement of the Second Front. However, the British would have had to redefine their strategy if Stalin supported Roosevelt³¹⁹ and Churchill was adamant that the US and Britain at least present a cohesive policy when he and the President met Stalin and not necessarily one that involved Overlord. In a telegram to Roosevelt on 23 October, Churchill wrote, "our present plans for 1944 seem open to very grave defects. We are to put 15 American and 12 British Divs into Overlord and will have about 6 American and 16 British or British-controlled divs on the Italian front. Unless there is a German collapse Hitler, lying in the centre of the best communications in the world, can concentrate at least 40 to 50 divs against either of these forces while holding the centre".³²⁰ Churchill went on to state that "the date of Overlord itself was fixed by splitting the difference between the American and

³¹⁶ Prime Minister to Marshal Stalin. *Prime Minister's Personal Telegram. Serial No. T. 894/3.* 26 June 1943. PREM3/333/5.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Kimball. Volume 2. 549.

³¹⁹ It is unlikely that Stalin would have supported any British plans for the Balkans given the veracity of his criticism of Churchill concerning the preference for Mediterranean operations instead of Europe in their correspondence.

British view. It is arguable that neither the forces building up in Italy nor those available for a May Overlord are strong enough for the tasks set them".³²¹

On 11 November, Stalin cabled Roosevelt to indicate that he would attend the Eureka Conference that would take place in Teheran and Kimball claims that the arrangements for the conference demonstrated the transformation in the relationship between Churchill and Roosevelt. He writes that "The President's attitude was more that of a senior than an equal partner when he made it clear that there would be no changes made in the schedules for Cairo and Teheran. Moreover, as his comment about not ganging up on Stalin makes clear, Roosevelt was far more concerned about Soviet-American relations than about the Anglo-American alliance".³²² Aware that Britain was falling out of the great power circle, Churchill informed Roosevelt on 29 June that he would not seek to deter any bi-lateral meeting between the President and Stalin³²³ should it take place. He only discovered that Roosevelt had invited Molotov to attend the Cairo talks that were a precursor to Eureka through Clark Kerr's intelligence, and, in a telegram to the President the Prime Minister asked that the arrival of the Soviet delegation be delayed to allow the US and British Chiefs of Staff the opportunity to conduct talks.³²⁴ Yet Roosevelt would not budge. On the day of his departure from Washington, the President informed Churchill that he saw no problem with Molotov attending the Cairo talks and once again stressed his wish that Stalin did not feel that the Western Alliance was conspiring without him.³²⁵ According to Roosevelt, both he and Churchill could be glad that the Soviet leader would be meeting with them and with that sentiment in the air between the leaders, the Cairo and Teheran Conferences opened just over two weeks later.

³²⁰ Churchill to Roosevelt. October 23, 1943. Kimball, Volume 2. 556.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Kimball. 596.

³²³ Former Naval Person to President. Prime Minister's Personal Telegram. Serial No. T.905/3. No. 334. 29 June 1943. PREM3/333/5

³²⁴ Prime Minister to President Roosevelt Personal. November 11, 1943. Kimball. 596.

CHAPTER FIVE.

Teheran.

"I must add that I am more anxious the campaign for 1944 than any other with which I have been involved".

Telegram from Churchill to Roosevelt. October 27, 1943.

The Widening Schism.

The British may have achieved their objective to continue with operations throughout the Mediterranean but the American decision to withhold any further troops and resources to theatres outside of North-West Europe and the establishment of a date for the commencement of Overlord widened the gulf between the two countries. The trans-Atlantic Alliance was no longer a relationship between two countries of equal standing and the decline of Britain's military power in relation to that of the US meant that London's ability to advocate their preferred strategy was ebbing away. For Churchill and his senior military command, this was a difficult notion to accept and immediately prior to the Cairo³²⁵ and Teheran³²⁷ Conferences, both they and their American counterparts consolidated their strategic points of view. On 18 November, four days before the opening of Sextant, the American Chiefs of Staff produced a memorandum in which they clearly stated that Overlord would be "the primary US-British ground and air effort against Germany".³²⁸ The American C.O.S. went on to dictate that, "As between operation OVERLORD and operations in the Mediterranean, where there is a shortage of resources, available resources will be distributed and employed with the main object of insuring the success of Overlord. Operations in the Mediterranean Theater will be carried out with the forces allotted except in so far as these may be varied by the decision of the Combined Chiefs of

³²⁵ Personal and Most Secret from the President to the Former Naval Person. 11 November 1943. Kimball. 597.

³²⁶ Codenamed Sextant.

³²⁷ Codenamed Eureka.

³²⁸ Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Specific Operations for the Defeat of Germany and Satellites, 1943-44. Memorandum from the United Chiefs of Staff.* C.C.S. No. 398. 18 November, 1943.

Staff".³²⁹ The Americans allowed for operations in Churchill's favoured areas of Norway³³⁰ and the Balkans but only with forces capable of carrying out low-level missions such as carrier-based aircraft, supply drops to the partisans or raids by Special Forces.

Contained within this memorandum was the unequivocal call for US and British operations to be co-ordinated with the Soviet Union. The development of dialogue and relations with the Soviet Union was becoming a key element within American strategy and this interaction would inevitably become a central characteristic of the Eureka summit and impact on the United States' relations with Britain.³³¹ The American Chiefs declared that, "we are now examining, and shall continue to seek out, methods and means whereby the defeat of Germany and her satellites can be expedited through maximum coordination of United States, British and U.S.S.R. operations".³³² A further indication of this process was the stipulation that "The extended plan will provide for emergency entry into Europe in collaboration with the U.S.S.R. of United Nations forces from the United Kingdom, the North African Theater of Operations, the Middle East, and, if required, directly from the United States".³³³ Roosevelt was looking beyond Sextant and one particular theatre and towards the larger issue of the United States' role in the international system. The President recognised the growing Soviet power, especially within Europe, and the meeting with Stalin at Teheran "was indeed of crucial importance, for it provided the greatest challenge and the greatest opportunity that had yet faced the foreign policy of the United States, in its transition from isolationism to an active intervention in world affairs".³³⁴ Having also

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ The American proposal was that Allied ground forces would only be committed to Norway if Overlord were rendered impossible.

³³¹ In a telegram to the President on 27 October, Churchill spoke of his disapproval of the prospect of a Russian military representative attending the meetings of the Joint Staffs in Cairo. Churchill wrote, "Unless he understood and spoke English, the delays would be intolerable. I do not know of any really high officer of the Russian Army who can speak English. Such a representative would have no authority or power to speak unless except as instructed. He would simply buy for an earlier Second Front and block all other discussion". Former Naval Person to President Roosevelt. *Prime Ministers Personal Telegram*. Serial no. T. 1747/3. No. 476. 27 October, 1943.

³³² Combined Chiefs of Staff. *Specific Operations for the Defeat of Germany and Satellites, 1943-44. Memorandum from the United Chiefs of Staff*. C.C.S. No. 398. 18 November, 1943.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ John Ehrman. *Grand Strategy. Volume V. August 1943 – September 1944*. London, H.M.S.O. 1956, 155.

recognised the emerging power of his own country, “the forthcoming conference would for the first time allow, and indeed demand, the exercise of this new responsibility, in concert with two great European powers whose own traditions and interests did not coincide. Roosevelt was therefore determined that the meeting with Stalin should succeed, and convinced that he must be the medium of its success”.³³⁵

Despite this transformation of the international political and military balance, Churchill directed his response, contained in a submission to the War Cabinet on 21 November at the Mediterranean rather than North-West Europe. He made it clear to his own staff at least that he did not favour a concerted effort in preparation for Overlord that was detached from the activity in the Mediterranean and he displayed his enduring fascination with the Balkans. The Prime Minister lamented the fact that the Allies had not reinforced Italy, that their forces had lost control of the Eastern Mediterranean and that the German resistance south of the Gustav Line coupled with poor weather and inadequate Allied equipment for the terrain that was encountered in Italy, meant that the advance northwards slowed. Churchill wrote that “There is not a sufficient preponderance over the enemy in the front line. Many of the Divisions have been continuously in action since the landing without any spell of relief”.³³⁶ The result of this inaction, according to Churchill, was that the Germans had gained a window of opportunity to withdraw forces from the peninsula and deploy them to the Eastern Front and he admitted: “We have therefore failed to take the weight of the attack off the Soviets”.³³⁷ In his opinion, the Allies were guilty of “complete neglect to do anything effective in the Balkan theatre. The Germans have weathered the difficulties caused by the Italian collapse and desertion and with great cruelty are mopping up many of the Patriot forces. We shall certainly be rightly accused of short-sightedness or even worse in all this affair”.³³⁸

With this claim of an absence of German troop withdrawals from Russia and the lack of support for the partisan movements throughout the Balkans,

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Minute by the Prime Minister to the War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee. *Future Operations in the European and Mediterranean Theatre*. C.C.S. (Sextant) 1. (Revise). 21 November, 1943. PREM3/136/12.

³³⁷ Ibid.

Britain's strategy had therefore failed to achieve two of the principal objectives upon which they had founded it. Yet Churchill did not accept that Britain was to the blame for these disappointments. He made it clear that in his opinion, the culpability for the stalemate in Italy and the German resurgence in the Balkans and the Aegean lay with the American insistence that the Allies did not transfer any additional forces away from the Overlord build-up. In Churchill's opinion, such a demand meant that, "An imaginary line has been drawn down the Mediterranean which relieves General Eisenhower's armies of all responsibility for or interest in the Dalmatian coast and the Balkans. These are assigned to General Wilson of the Middle East Command, but he does not possess the necessary forces. Once Command has the forces but not the responsibilities. The other the responsibilities but not the forces. This is certainly a very bad arrangement and reflects severely on our conduct of the war".³³⁹ Having shrouded the report in the melancholy of disappointment with the claim that the Allies not taken control of Rome, had not held the enemy along the front-line and allowed the Germans to assume control of the Aegean, Churchill would not relent in his condemnation of the US policy.

His final point was that the Quadrant decisions were taken prior to the Italian campaign and he maintained that "We have protested ceaselessly, but as we could not obtain agreement we have so far carried out the QUADRANT decisions. It has not been possible to meet together earlier. We are now faced with the prospect that a fixed date for OVERLORD will continue to wreck and ruin the Mediterranean campaign: that our affairs will deteriorate in the Balkans and that the Aegean will remain firmly in German hands".³⁴⁰ He argued that of the two million American and British service personnel stationed in the Mediterranean only 170'000 of them had deployed to the front line, and he wrote: "yet here is the place where alone we are in contact with the enemy and where we can certainly bring superior numbers to bear upon him now. It is certainly an odd way of helping the Russians, to slow down the fight in the only theatre where anything can be done for some months".³⁴¹ The solution proposed by Churchill was that further troop and landing craft

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

withdrawals should cease and all efforts undertaken to capture Rome. Churchill again spoke of the need to try to induce Turkey into the war to acquire the Turkish airfields and the possibility of Allied commandos seizing bridgeheads on the Dalmatian coastline that would aid resistance throughout the Balkans and Yugoslavia and re-establish air superiority in the Adriatic and Aegean Seas.³⁴²

The contents of this minute present the image of a leader persisting in vain to convince his allies of his government and military leadership's point of view. Yet persistent the British were. Churchill and the British delegation arrived at the Cairo discussion table prepared to move this agenda forwards although with the Chinese Generalissimo present planning for the Far East assumed centre stage. This was not a welcome development for the British, who having lost their Far Eastern Empire and without sizable forces in that region could only have minimal input into what decisions the leaders took. In addition, they failed to achieve satisfaction with the deferment of a decision as to the command structure for the individual theatres and the cross-Channel enterprise. The American proposal that the Allies appoint a 'Supreme Commander' for the European operation did not sit well with Churchill or his senior military command who responded by saying that His Majesty's Government would not place a British officer in such a position of responsibility and his preference was for the status quo. The Prime Minister argued that "It is not seen why the present arrangement should not continue, subject to any minor improvements that can be suggested. Under this arrangement an American Commander would conduct the immense Cross-Channel Operation and a British Commander would conduct the war in the Mediterranean, their action being concerted and forces assigned by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, working under the heads of the two Governments".³⁴³

Given the sentiment expressed in this statement, it is not difficult to see why the Americans would have suspected British motives for maintaining an

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² British commandos and Royal Marine units operated in small, low-level operations throughout Yugoslavia and the Aegean Sea in 1943 and early 1944. However, there would be no injection of large-scale infantry formations into the theatre.

³⁴³ Ehrman. *Grand Strategy. Volume V. August 1943 – September 1944*. 172.

active presence throughout the Mediterranean. Churchill made his feelings on the subject clear in his opening comments to the Second Plenary Meeting despite Roosevelt's statement that final decisions regarding strategy would depend on the outcome of the forthcoming discussions with Stalin. Churchill applauded the successes throughout North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Pacific, the Russian Front and the campaign in Italy. His summary was that "In the whole history of warfare, there had never been such a long period of joint Allied success, nor with such a high degree of co-operation and comradeship extending from the High Command down to the troops in the field between two Allies".³⁴⁴ However, despite such words of praise, Churchill quickly reminded those around the table, including Roosevelt, Marshall, King and Hopkins, that the Italian offensive had slowed and that through bad weather and the withdrawal of forces destined for the United Kingdom, the morale of those units deployed in Italy had diminished. Churchill claimed to have agreed to the withdrawal of the British divisions, "with a heavy heart",³⁴⁵ and the result was that those units that had remained in place had been in contact with the Germans for long periods without respite.

The Prime Minister repeated the sentiments contained within his memorandum that the Germans had regained their footholds in the Aegean and he spoke of the British withdrawals from the Greek Islands that they had seized but then relinquished due to the Allied inability to capture the larger island of Rhodes. Churchill spoke of his undiminished commitment to Overlord and that the sixteen British divisions designated to cross the Channel would be ready but "this operation should not be such a tyrant as to rule out every other activity in the Mediterranean; for example, a little flexibility in the employment of landing craft ought to be conceded". Churchill asked that the return of the landing craft to the United Kingdom that had been scheduled for December be deferred to January although the minutes record that he "wished to remove any idea that we had weakened, cooled or were trying to get out of Overlord".³⁴⁶ Churchill claimed that Britain was committed to

³⁴⁴ *Minutes from the Second Plenary Meeting, Sextant Conference, Cairo. C.O.S. (Sextant) 2nd Meeting. 24 November, 1943.*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Overlord, "to the hilt."³⁴⁷ However, his projected scheme was to prepare for Overlord but inside the framework of the Mediterranean strategy. This involved the Allies capturing Rome in the following January, Rhodes in February, arranging supplies to the partisans in Yugoslavia, establishing the command arrangements, clearing the Germans from the Aegean and continuing the overtures to Turkey to enter the war. Across the table, the Americans listened and in the face of such dogged argument became increasingly determined that their strategic demands would prevail in Iran.

Presenting the Status Quo at Teheran.

Churchill, Brooke and the British delegation arrived at the Teheran Conference that opened on 28 November as the circumstances of the war underwent an even greater transformation in the ten months since they had convened with the Americans at Casablanca. Soviet forces were now driving the Germans out of the Ukraine and pressing towards the borders of Europe's eastern states and as a result, Stalin cast a much larger shadow over this conference than he could have done had he attended any of the leaders' earlier consultations. Roosevelt's desire to seek closer bi-lateral relations with the Soviet Union surfaced in the first meeting. With the opening pleasantries concluded, the President began with an account of the war situation from the American point of view detailing action against the Japanese throughout the Pacific as well as reference to an overland assault that the Allies would be launching throughout Burma with the aid of the Chinese. In relation to Europe, the area of most concern to Stalin, Roosevelt made it clear that there had been a definite intention on the part of the US and Britain to cross the Channel throughout the previous year and a half, yet such action had not taken place due to shipping constraints and insufficient troop numbers. The President explained that the US and Britain had examined a number of plans throughout various regions but that this conference was the place to decide what definite action would be undertaken. The minutes from this meeting recorded that Stalin's response was that while Soviet Union felt that the Italian

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

campaign to be of value to the Allied cause, he believed that "Italy was not a suitable jumping-off ground for the invasion of Germany. The Alps stood between. Therefore, nothing was to be gained by concentrating large numbers of troops in Italy for the invasion of Germany. Turkey would be a better point of entry than Italy, but it was a long way from the heart of Germany. Consequently, the Soviet believed that North or North-Western France was the place for Anglo-American forces to attack, though it was, of course, true that the Germans there would resist desperately".³⁴⁸

In his opening address, Churchill attempted to do a number of things. First, he tried to persuade the Soviet leader of Britain's commitment to Overlord. His account was that the US and Britain had long agreed that such an enterprise should be undertaken and that operations in the Mediterranean were of a secondary character but were the best contribution the Western Alliance could make to the Allied cause in 1943. However, in presenting this explanation, Churchill revealed a fundamental weakness in the British military structure and the widening power gap between Britain and the United States. Churchill admitted that the Allies would deploy thirty-five Allied divisions across the Channel, but the sixteen divisions that Britain was committing was the limit that a nation of 45 million could do and that the US would have to "broaden the front and nourish the battle",³⁴⁹ as it held a larger number of reserves.

The second endeavour of Churchill's address was to draw attention to the situation on the Italian front and while referring to the failure to capture Rome, Churchill claimed that the intention of the Italian campaign was to seize the capital and the airfields in the north from which the bomber offensive could target southern Germany. Yet Churchill also used the occasion to raise the possibility of pushing further east in the Mediterranean arguing that he and the President had still to decide what action their forces should take in the time between the Conference and the proposed date for Overlord. The minutes documented that "one of the possibilities was to move into Southern France, and the second, suggested by the President, was to move from the head of the Adriatic North-East towards the Danube. Meanwhile, however, the

³⁴⁸ Eureka 1st Meeting. *Minutes of the First Plenary Meeting held at the Soviet Embassy, Tehran, at 4.30p.m. on Sunday, 28 November, 1943.* PREM3/136/11.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

problem that had been exercising the minds of the President and himself was what should be done in the next six months. In the first place, there was much to be said for supporting Tito, who was holding a number of German divisions and doing much more for the Allied cause than the Chetniks under Mihailovic. There was clearly a great advantage in supporting him with supplies and guerrilla activities, but these would not absorb any considerable troops".³⁵⁰ Churchill also spoke of opening the lines of communication and supply through the Aegean and into the Black Sea once Turkey had entered the war. Such a move would increase the supply convoys to the Soviet Union utilising vessels already based in the region whereas at the point in time, the Western Alliance could send only four convoys on the Northern Run due to the lack of escort ships that were otherwise engaged in the Overlord build-up. However, these matters held little interest for Stalin who was determined to gain answers on the scale and applicability of Overlord and expressed his opinion that "it would be a mistake to disperse forces by sending part to Turkey and elsewhere and part to Southern France. The best course would be make OVERLORD the basic operation for 1944 and, once Rome had been captured to send all available forces in Italy to Southern France. These forces could then join hands with the OVERLORD forces when the invasion was launched".³⁵¹

Brooke addressed the issue of the Mediterranean in relation to Overlord at a meeting of military experts the following day and returned to the theme of keeping as many German divisions engaged as possible. His case throughout this meeting remained wed to the notion that the Allies should not allow operations in Italy and the Mediterranean to come to a halt. Even when faced with questioning from Marshal Voroshilov,³⁵² the Soviet Union's chief

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Kliment Yefrimovich Voroshilov, 1881-1969, became active in politics in 1903 and served as a commander in the Red Army during the civil war (1919-1921) that followed the revolution. He was appointed commissar for defence in 1925, a post he held until 1940 when he was given command of the northwestern front. Voroshilov was a close ally of Stalin who appointed him to the Politburo in 1926 and the Supreme Soviet in 1937. Following the Second World War, Voroshilov's power increased when he was appointed to the chair of the Soviet Presidium in 1953 upon Stalin's death but was forced to resign 7 years later after being accused of anti-party activity by Khrushchev. Voroshilov also resigned from the party's Central Committee but was re-appointed in 1966 after Khrushchev was ousted from power and held the post until his death in 1969.

delegate, as to the benefits of such actions and the determination of Marshall to cease all activities in that theatre, Brooke continued to argue his corner. The minutes recorded that in his opening statement, Brooke maintained that "By the "Overlord" operation a large number of German divisions would be engaged, but that operation could not take place until, at least, the 1st May. There was, therefore, a period of at least five to six months during which, before the "Overlord" operation took place, it would be necessary to keep on engaging the German divisions. It was important to take full advantage of the forces now located in the Mediterranean and of the logistic and other facilities established in that area".³⁵³ Brooke's account of the situation in the region and on the Italian Peninsula mirrored that which Churchill had given to the leaders the previous day. He argued that with the Allied forces holding a line south of Rome they had engaged around 23 German divisions yet "To speed up the advance, it was important to have some forces capable of carrying out a flanking operation by means of an amphibious landing."³⁵⁴ He also insisted that through the launching of amphibious assaults against the German positions in Italy, "German forces would be held in the Mediterranean while preparations for the launching of "Overlord" were being made".³⁵⁵

Although Marshall reminded his Soviet counterpart that the lack of shipping and landing craft had impeded any European operations and that, "no definite conclusion had been reached as to the future operations to be undertaken,"³⁵⁶ Voroshilov's focus was on the Second Front and any lingering reservation on the part of the British over its viability. The Marshal wanted to know what measures the Western Alliance was taking to remedy the problems associated with the shortfalls in shipping and landing craft so that Overlord commenced at the agreed date of May 1944 and he wanted to know whether Brooke considered Overlord to be the operation of first importance.³⁵⁷ Brooke's reply was that the British had always attached the greatest importance to a cross-Channel operation but he again stressed that the Allies must time their landings so as to allow the greatest chance for success; in

³⁵³ Tehran Conference. *Minutes of Meeting of Military Experts held at the Soviet Embassy, Tehran, on Monday 29th November, 1943, at 10.30 a.m.* PREM3/136/5.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

other words, when German morale cracked or there was a discernable breakdown in the fighting ability of the German forces. Brooke stated that “The fortifications of Northern France were very formidable and the communications in the area excellent. This gives the Germans a good chance of getting up reserves quickly, which makes it essential to lay down certain conditions as being necessary for the operation to be undertaken”.³⁵⁸

Brooke claimed that in the British opinion, these conditions would exist in 1944 and in preparation for that eventuality, the British Army was being reorganised from a force with a defensive posture into an expeditionary force and its divisions were being trained for amphibious landings. The cost of this exercise was that it was drawing heavily on the operations in the Mediterranean and impeding the progress of the Italian campaign and he maintained that for the British such developments “would be most undesirable.” Brooke conceded that the operations in the Mediterranean were secondary to Overlord, “but that there were certain forces deployed in the Mediterranean now from which certain advantages could be derived and should be derived. All action contemplated in the Mediterranean, he said, was strategically interlocked with the rest of the war and played an important part, both as regards “Overlord” and as regards holding divisions away from the Russian Front”.³⁵⁹ The British commander also pointed out that the Allies had made detailed studies of every aspect of a cross-Channel invasion but there were “certain technical difficulties, such as long shelving beaches which made landing operations difficult on many parts of the coast”.³⁶⁰ Unrelenting in his drive to keep the operations in the Mediterranean going, Brooke again tried to persuade the American commanders of this policy at the meeting of the Military Committee on the 30th when he argued for the capture of Rome and the allocation of landing craft that would be required for an advance up the peninsula. The Americans conceded on the point that the landing craft needed to advance on the Pisa-Rimini line would remain in the Mediterranean until 15 January as opposed to their earlier demand of December. However, this discussion closed with the agreement that the Allies would make no

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

further troop allocations to the Mediterranean and that the Chiefs would recommend that the President and Prime Minister inform Stalin that Overlord would commence no later than June 1st.

In a conversation with Stalin that evening, Churchill was candid regarding his strategic preference and his feelings towards the American point of view. His case to Stalin was that the British had preponderance over the Americans in terms of forces stationed in the Mediterranean of three or four to one and that it was his wish that these forces engaged the Germans at all times. The problem lay in the American demand that the British launch an offensive against the Japanese in the Bay of Bengal but there was not the landing craft available for this to commence. If there were enough landing craft in the Mediterranean then this operation could have been possible but Churchill argued that "the Americans had pinned us down to a date for Overlord and operations in the Mediterranean had suffered in the last two months. Our army was somewhat disheartened by the removal of the 7 divisions. We had sent home our 3 divisions and the Americans were sending theirs, all in preparation for Overlord. That was the reason for not taking advantage of the Italian collapse. But it also proved the earnestness of our preparations for Overlord".³⁶¹

The record of this conversation illustrates that Churchill was in favour of an American appointment to the position of Supreme Commander for Overlord, but that the overwhelming number of British forces stationed in the Mediterranean meant that a separate command for that theatre must rest with a British officer. The appointment of a British officer to the post of Mediterranean command allowed them a certain degree of independence from the Americans and it meant that they were in a better position to determine the course of the war in that region themselves. The records from this meeting lend support to this view as they state "the Prime Minister had his own ideas about the war there".³⁶² The weakness in the British case was their inability to determine the allocation of landing craft as the majority of what the Allies were producing was coming from American production lines and this

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ *Record of Conversation between the Prime Minister and Marshall Stalin*. 30 November, 1943. PREM3/136/8.

meant that the United States had the final say on its allocation and use. Stalin warned Churchill of the importance that the Soviet Union had attached to Overlord and his desire to seek a firm promise from the Western Alliance that the operation would commence in the agreed month of May. He warned that any failure on the US and British side would result in disappointment in the Soviet Union and its armed forces and this would lead to bad feeling. He also warned that if Overlord did not commence then the Soviet ability to carry on the war would be in doubt given the battle weariness of its forces. Hence, his main concern was to solicit the promise and commitment that Overlord would open on schedule and the Soviet leader received Churchill's word that the British were firmly behind the May deadline. Overlord would commence along with a diversionary raid in the south of France and at the close of the Teheran Conference, Britain had finally given its commitment to opening the Second Front in North-West Europe.

³⁶² Ibid.

CONCLUSION.

Britain's Commitment to the Second Front.

"I despair of ever getting our American friends to have any sort of strategic vision. Their drag on us has already seriously affected our Mediterranean strategy and the whole conduct of the war. If they had come wholeheartedly into the Mediterranean with us we should by now have Rome securely, the Balkans would be ablaze, the Dardanelles would be open, and we should be over the high way towards getting Rumania and Bulgaria out of the war".

General Sir Alan Brooke. Diary entry. 19 November 1943.

The Teheran Conference concluded with the pledge from the United States and Britain to Stalin that Operation Overlord would commence in May 1944. In conjunction with this assault, smaller diversionary landings would take place against Southern France and the Red Army would launch a major offensive in the East with the aim of preventing any German troop transfers to the newly created Western Front. The decisions reached at Teheran were formalised in the final report that the Combined Chiefs of Staff submitted to their political masters after the Sextant Conference had resumed in December and which outlined the course of Allied strategy from the beginning of 1944.³⁶³ The report reaffirmed Overlord as the supreme operation for 1944. It stated that, "Operations in the Aegean, including in particular the capture of Rhodes, are desirable, provided that they can be fitted in without detriment to Overlord and Anvil"³⁶⁴ and, in order to meet this objective, decreed that, "Every effort must be made by accelerated building and conversion to provide the essential additional landing craft for the European theatre."³⁶⁵ The Combined Chiefs allowed the offensive aimed at reaching the Pisa-Rimini line in Northern Italy to continue however, the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean could only retain the landing craft designated for Overlord until 15 January. After that date, all craft had to return to Europe to begin preparations for the opening of the Second Front in a move that for the previous three years the

³⁶³ *Report to the President and Prime Minister of the Agreed Summary of Conclusions reached by the Combined Chiefs of Staff at the Sextant Conference.* C.C.S. 426/1, 16 December, 1943. PREM3/136/9.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Americans had favoured for bringing about the Allied victory in the Second World War.

Britain's Commitment to the Mediterranean and Challenges throughout the Inter-War Years.

In June 1940, the Mediterranean region and the Middle East was not only a theatre of operations in which combat had commenced and one in which Britain could successfully engage the Axis but it was also a region into which it had invested military, economic and financial capital beginning in the late 1880's.³⁶⁶ Howard writes: "Italy's entry into the war had turned the Middle East into an active theatre of operations. As a centre of gravity for British forces, it was second only to the United Kingdom itself. Egypt has been a *place d'armies* for nearly sixty years. The establishment of British influence in the successor states to the Ottoman Empire, the development of the oil resources in Iraq and the Persian Gulf, the uneasy responsibilities of the Palestine Mandate, all had increased Britain's military involvement in the area during the years before the war".³⁶⁷ Throughout the inter-war period, Arab nationalism had boiled beneath the thin covering of imperial defence and policing. Iraq, Palestine and Egypt experienced unrest and although the

³⁶⁶ Britain's influence in the Mediterranean Sea and Middle East rested upon two foundations. The first was the dominance of the Royal Navy throughout the Mediterranean Sea founded upon the victories over its European rivals in the 1700's. The Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 and Nelson's destruction of the French fleet at Alexandria on August 1st 1798 heralded a maritime dominance that lasted until the middle of the Twentieth Century. The second and most significant foundation was control over the Suez Canal. The British government did not assume control over the Suez Canal until the Khedive of Egypt sold his majority holding to the Disraeli government in 1875 for four million pounds. This commercial domination deepened a year later when Britain and France took over international control of Egyptian finance following the Khedive's bankruptcy and throughout the next six years this influence extended to include political rule with the two European powers establishing a system of Dual Control in 1881. The following year a British expeditionary force landed in Egypt in retaliation to rioting that had broken out in Alexandria. This campaign culminated with the Battle of Tel el Kebir on 12 September in which the forces under Major-General Sir Garnet Wolseley defeated the Egyptian army of Arabi Pasha. Tel el Kebir heralded the beginning of British direct rule. In an effort to strengthen this position, the British placed a High Commissioner and Consul-General in residence in Cairo along with a financial officer. They also restructured the Egyptian Army and its mandate was to maintain internal order especially within the Suez Canal Zone that by 1900 served as the crucial link with India, the colonies of the Far East and the Antipodean Dominions.

³⁶⁷ Michael Howard. *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War*. (London, Greenhill Books, 1993). 9-10.

British moved quickly to subdue any dissent, there was a shift on their part towards granting the territories a measure of independence while at the same time keeping them in the British sphere of control. Although Egypt became an 'independent state' in February 1922, the terms of the agreement allowed the British to retain control over imperial communications, the protection of foreign interests within Egypt, the country's defence and the Sudan. The granting of limited home rule could not stem the nationalist tide at the centre of gravity. In 1924, the ultra nationalist Wafd party secured a majority within the parliament and nationalists murdered the Governor-General of the Sudan and Commander of the Egyptian Army Sir Lee Stack in Cairo.

The following twelve years were marked by serious division between Egypt's political factions and in their relations with the Egyptian King but rather than exploit this division Britain gradually withdrew its forces back into the Canal Zone and Egypt was granted greater autonomy. This new relationship was formalised with the treaty of 1936 under which the British not only withdrew their forces to the Canal Zone but they agreed to end their presence in Cairo after four years and in Alexandria after a further eight. Nevertheless, even under this new agreement the British could not allow themselves to be completely divorced from their influence over Egypt. They undertook to train and equip the Egyptian army and the treaty stipulated that Egypt was to become a British ally in times of war. The military facilities throughout the Canal Zone were expanded to include additional air and land forces and permission for British units to train in the desert outside that zone. Britain and Egypt ratified the treaty in London on 22 December 1936 and Egypt joined the League of Nations on 26 May 1937.

Along with having to deal with Arab nationalism, Britain's position in the region came under threat from the ambitions of Italy. Until 1934, the British had regarded their relations with Italy as friendly, which had been an ally of the Triple Entente in the Great War, and even after the formation of Mussolini's government in 1922, relations between London and Rome remained warm. Mussolini was a signatory of the Locarno Treaty in 1925 and during the first eleven years that he was in office, he acted as the conciliator between the European powers. In 1934 Mussolini's anti-German stance and the close relations he had forged with France and Britain since taking power, underwent

a radical change that was to prove fatal for the fascist regime, the Empire and the man himself. Italian forces stationed in Somaliland clashed with Abyssinian troops on the border and after a year of threats and military build up, Italy embarked upon an invasion in October 1935. The regime of Haile Salasee fell to the technical superiority of the Italians and along with Eritrea, Somaliland and Libya the Duce had started to build what he regarded as a new 'Roman Empire'. The Abyssinian action was in direct contravention of the League of Nations' Covenant and on 10 October 1935, the Assembly of the League of Nations resolved to take collective measures against Italy.

The imposition of sanctions by the League only served to prevent a European war in the short term. The western democracies not only tried to avoid a war while at the same time acting to prevent fascist aggression and expansion. The problem was that these two policies could not be reconciled. While conflict did not erupt in 1935, the sanctions merely isolated Mussolini from the western democracies and increased his popularity at home. More importantly, they had demonstrated that the League was not prepared to act decisively to prevent aggression and if Italy could defy the League in this manner then there was no reason why a powerful Germany could not follow the same course. Hibbert claims that the failure of the League was not "merely a vindication of the philosophy of force, it was not only another demonstration of the decadence of democracy; the League's debacle marked the end of the so-called Stresa Front and the beginning of the Italo-German alliance".³⁶⁸

If war had broken out in 1935 then Britain would have withstood the worst of the fighting. They could have derailed the Italian war effort by closing the Suez Canal to Italian shipping and by striking against the communication lines between Italy and her North African possessions, most important being Libya. Playfair writes: "of the fifty states in the Assembly who supported the policy, Great Britain alone showed any signs of readiness to adopt the extreme measures which in the last resort might be necessary to make it effective. At the end of September, the British reinforced the Mediterranean Fleet deployed at Alexandria, Port Said, and Haifa. There were British troops and air forces in

³⁶⁸ Christopher Hibbert, *Benito Mussolini: A Biography*, (London: The Reprint Society of London, 1962), 96.

Egypt. Signor Mussolini was therefore taking a great risk in electing to fight a war in an under-developed country to which his sole means of access was by sea - either through the Suez Canal or all the way round the Cape. Nevertheless, the gamble succeeded for apart from making a few promises to provide facilities at certain Mediterranean harbours for the British Fleet the other nations stood aside and awaited events. The Suez Canal, in accordance with the Constantinople Convention, remained open to the passage of Italian ships, so that warlike stores of all kinds continued to pass freely on their way".^{369 370}

The problem for the British was that any move on their part would have precipitated a retaliatory strike against Royal Navy vessels in the theatre and the possibility of an air attack on the Fleet lying at anchor. Such action increased the vulnerability of the Sea Lines of Communication between Egypt, London and India but the Royal Navy lacked reserves of anti-aircraft ammunition and the air defences at its ports were weak. Playfair claims that the British would have had to rely on striking Italian facilities at Cyrenaica however, the Italian bombers had a far greater reach than those of the Royal Air Force and if this were to be successful, then the British would have to establish forward landing bases near the western border of Egypt. The British forces in the region were already overstretched both in terms of their manpower and equipment levels. By reinforcing the border with Libya, the British were faced with long supply lines as most of the supply and maintenance depots were located in the Canal and Delta regions of Egypt. There was also the issue of British forces operating in internal policing actions especially as Italian propaganda aimed at stirring nationalist opinion.

The Italian actions during this period demonstrated that in the advent of war, Britain would have to commit forces to three separate theatres - the European continent, the Far East and the Mediterranean basin. In a bid to avoid this scenario, Britain sought to restore friendly relations with Rome. Howard writes that "the long-term possibilities of the new situation were plain

³⁶⁹ I.S.O. Playfair, *The Mediterranean and the Middle East*, Vol. 1, (London: H.M.S.O, 1954), 2-3.

³⁷⁰ The Constantinople Convention of 1888 forbade any state to close the Suez Canal in either peace or war to any vessels of any state. This included warships. No act of aggression was to be committed in the Canal or within three miles of it.

enough, and without waiting for the outcome of the war the Chiefs of Staff gave their Three Power Enemy warning to the Government: the danger of the simultaneous hostility of Germany, Japan and Italy, they said, emphasised the need for Allies, and especially friendship with France. It was necessary, in their view, not to be estranged from any Mediterranean power that lay athwart our main artery of communication with the East".³⁷¹ Britain's diplomatic effort to continue a friendship with Italy failed because of Mussolini's imperial ambitions, the emergence of the Axis alliance and the Duce's desire to supplant the British as the primary power in the Mediterranean region. Jackson points to the torpedoing of British shipping off Spanish waters presumably by Italian submarines, the hostility of Italian military and political figures in the media and Italian overtures to Arab populations under British control as examples of Mussolini trying to gain Mediterranean dominance. Italian support for General Franco during the Spanish Civil War placed a further strain on relations with Britain and Germany and Italy recognised the Franco regime in November 1936. The creation of the Rome-Berlin Axis and twelve months later cemented this unity when Europe's fascist regimes signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan.

The tension between Italy and Britain temporarily eased by the signing of the Anglo-Italian Joint Declaration on 2 January 1937 under which both countries recognised the freedom of movement within the Mediterranean Sea and another potential opportunity to repair relations came in 1938 when German forces forced the *Anschluss* with Austria without consulting the Italian government. However, this window was not open for long. In the months following the conclusion of the Joint Declaration, Italian military commanders declared that they would be strengthening their forces in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea and Indian Oceans and establishing a High Command in North Africa. When the Munich Conference convened Mussolini stood firmly by Hitler's side and in its wake, the British Chiefs of Staff advocated an acceleration of Britain's own re-armament programme. In an effort to counter the Italian threat, an anti-aircraft brigade and a light tank battalion deployed to Egypt. In February 1938, the Cabinet authorised army units in the region to be

³⁷¹ Ibid, 5.

brought up to strength and provided further transport and the Air Force was strengthened, albeit by outmoded equipment and only by one squadron. Germany was now Britain's most serious enemy and to provide further resources to the Middle East was to deplete those in the United Kingdom and responsible for Home defence.

Central to the British plan was the knowledge that the lifeline of the Italian Empire was under British control. Italian war supplies and men had to pass through the Suez Canal to reach Rome's East African possessions. As well as this, Mussolini's ambitions were proving to be a serious drain on the Italian economy however; the Duce's territorial ambitions overrode any fiscal concern. Italy might be an Axis member but its lack of financial and military capabilities meant that it was in no position to fight a long war on the other side of the Mediterranean. Germany could alleviate some of the Italian military deficiencies but British military planners considered Italy to be the weakest point in the Axis alliance. Their strategic concept rested upon a counter offensive against Italian assets in North Africa early in the war preceding a campaign against Germany. Howard writes that, "In the First World War as in the Second, the positions which the British had occupied the Middle East, mainly to safeguard her route to India, in fact proved valuable primarily as a base from which they could attack the most vulnerable of their adversaries".³⁷²

The reasoning behind the formulation of this strategy was sound prior to 1939. The French were the dominant power in the western Mediterranean while the British assumed the leading role in the east. France maintained large garrisons throughout North-West Africa with smaller forces stationed near the Equator. French forces stationed in Syria were reinforced by powerful naval squadrons at Mers-el-Kebir and Bizerta. The German offensive in Western Europe and the division between Vichy and Free French altered this picture for the British as not only did they need to counter Mussolini's ambitions but they also offered support to the activities and plans of the Free French. Following his exile to London in 1940, Charles de Gaulle sought to rally the colonies of the French Empire to his cause and he and the British selected North Africa as a theatre in which they could establish a base for

³⁷² Howard, 60.

their operations. Thompson writes that “An immediate target for Britain and for de Gaulle was Dakar, the French naval base and port of Senegal, French West Africa, strategically well placed to menace and to harry British shipping in the South Atlantic”.³⁷³

‘No’ Second Front Now.

While the Free French and the Italians diverted Britain’s resources towards the Mediterranean region, the research undertaken for this thesis lends support to Leighton’s analysis that the British advocated the Mediterranean campaign as a prelude to any invasion of North-West Europe and accepted the American position that a cross-Channel enterprise was the only way of defeating Germany. However, having said this, the thesis has also demonstrated that Britain recognised that in the immediate aftermath of the evacuation of the Expeditionary Force and the Armistice of Compiegne of 1940, they faced a land-based enemy superior in the number of divisions, equipment and weaponry. Neither was there assistance from a Continental power or the United States until the latter part of 1941. Churchill and his military commanders; for example, Brooke, were concerned with preventing an invasion of their own shores and Britain’s lack of military capability compared to what it believed Germany possessed dictated its strategic choice during this phase of the conflict. This course of action is summarised by Sainsbury who writes that “faced with a more powerful enemy, operating on interior lines, the obvious course for a country with global commitments and resources thinly spread all over the world was to use its superior naval power to launch surprise attacks on the more vulnerable parts of the enemy occupied territory; harassing the enemy and keeping him constantly on the qui-vie, while at the same time encouraging the subjugated peoples of occupied Europe to rise in resistance”.³⁷⁴ Ben-Moshe presents a similar point of view in that the Chiefs of Staff sought a policy of attrition because “Once Germany had been worn down it would be possible to go on the offensive on

³⁷³ R.W. Thompson. *Generalissimo Churchill*. (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1973). 84.

all fronts in the spring of 1942. They emphasised that it was not their objective to build up a powerful army that could invade the Continent and defeat the German army. The Army would enter Europe only when given the opportunity to do so after Germany had been severely weakened by strategic bombing, by blockade, by internal subversion, and by the organisation of uprisings all over Europe. They noted the importance of eliminating Italy from the war: its collapse would remove the threat of the Middle East, permit Britain to strengthen its defences in the Far East, and tighten the blockade on Germany".³⁷⁵

The military balance between the United Kingdom and Germany in North-West Europe did not alter with the American entry into the war and nor did Britain's approach to its strategy. The blueprint that Churchill presented to the Americans at the first Washington Conference showed that London believed that the Mediterranean ought to have been the Allies' primary theatre of operations, at least for 1942 despite the entry into the war of its new ally. The report also highlighted lingering British fears regarding Operation Sealion by stating, "The presence of United States troops in the British Isles would be a powerful additional deterrent against an attempt at invasion by Germany. It would enable us to nourish the campaign in North Africa by two more divisions and one complete armoured division".³⁷⁶ Had the United States entered the war with its armed forces and industrial base fully mobilised for war then it could have presented a stronger hand for when lobbying for the Second Front rather than operations in the Mediterranean. Yet, this was not the case and Marshall hindered his own argument at the meetings in London in April 1942 by not only pressing for Round-Up but also insisting that Sledgehammer could become a possibility should the Russian Front collapse during that year.

This was a crucial mistake on Marshall's part as although Britain remained in the process of re-building its armed forces and consolidating what remained of its Empire in the wake of Axis offensives, they were preponderant in troop

³⁷⁴ Keith Sainsbury. *The North African Landings, 1942*. (London, Davis-Poynter Limited, 1976), 19.

³⁷⁵ Tuvia Ben-Moshe. *Churchill: Strategy and History*. (Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 127.

numbers to their allies in Europe and the Mediterranean at that time. Therefore, they argued to the Americans that they would have had to provide the bulk of the forces to Sledgehammer which would be out-numbered and inferior to the Wehrmacht in terms of divisions and firepower while at the same time, demanding that the Allies protect the Indian Ocean and Middle East from further Axis incursion. Marshall tried to placate the British by offering American reinforcements for their units in the Middle East yet the inequality between British and US forces proved too much of a weakness for him to overcome in trying to convince Churchill and his military commanders of the viability of a Second Front. Both Churchill and the C.O.S. conducted feasibility studies on the matter throughout 1942 but there was disagreement amongst the Prime Minister and his military hierarchy as to the venture's chances for success. The reports cited the formidability of the German defences, the unsuitability of the designated landing areas, the lack of air cover, the continuing U-Boat threat in the Atlantic Ocean as reasons for not proceeding.³⁷⁷ The plans were also limited in their scope and called for an almost immediate debarkation of British forces once they had landed³⁷⁸ and their subsequent dismissal suggests that Britain was not prepared to accept the risk of failure as well as the loss of men and equipment.

The British stated their objective to defend the Indian Ocean and sub-Continent and the Middle East at the meetings with Hopkins and Marshall in April 1942 yet Churchill's 'acceptance' of the principles contained within Marshall's proposal was necessary as Britain needed to ensure that the United States did not abandon the 'Germany First' policy. The irony to this

³⁷⁶ J.R.M Gwyer. *The Official History of the Second World War. Vol. 3, Part 1.* (London, H.M.S.O, 1956-76), 327.

³⁷⁷ See Chapter 4 for examination of these discussions.

³⁷⁸ An example of such a plan was Operation Imperator that the British C.O.S devised in 1942. Under these plans, a British division and armoured units would land on the Continent for 2 to 3 days then re-embark for England and would commence if the Russians appeared to be cracking under the German pressure. Churchill was against the plan, fearing that it would be costly in terms of lives and equipment and that it would be disastrous for Britain's image around the world if the operation met in failure. Churchill's objections centred on British forces landing on a small beachhead and the superior firepower from the German defences. Churchill did concede that if several landings took place then the operation may have stood a greater chance for success but a single landing scheduled only for a few days would not allow the British formations to advance any great distance into enemy territory. Churchill asked the Chiefs of Staff to consider a cross-Channel assault only if they intended Allied forces to remain ashore and if the Germans became demoralised by failure in Russia.

acceptance is that it could be interpreted as a ruse on the part of the British for as long as Europe remained the destination for the bulk of the US forces they could deploy units for service outside of Europe which otherwise would have been required for the defence of the Home Islands. Britain needed American assistance, as their own forces were over-stretched and unable to match those of the Axis in ensuring that it retained what was left of its colonial possessions and spheres of influence, for example, the Suez Canal. Churchill himself made this position clear yet despite his acquiescence, the British refused to offer any commitment to a timetable or specific points for possible landings³⁷⁹ In Normandy and they continued to insist that any venture depended upon Germany's internal disintegration and collapse of its military capability. While the reasons mentioned offered above are possible explanations for Churchill's opposition to Sledgehammer, Grigg contends that it stemmed from his private doubts over the fighting quality of the British forces especially after the loss of Singapore. He argues: "Wherever political salvation was to be sought, it must not be across the Channel. Since the vast American Army that General Marshall was raising would not be ready for such an operation in 1942, the bulk of the forces involved would have to be British; and on all grounds Churchill was unwilling to expose them to the venture. He feared terrible carnage and above all, perhaps, a setback even more devastating than Singapore – and far closer to home".^{379 380} The British maintained this line of argument throughout 1942 and 1943 despite the fact that the aerial bombing offensive and naval blockade had not proved successful in undermining Germany's economic base or civilian and military morale and combat effectiveness.

The inability of the Americans to launch Sledgehammer and Roosevelt's agreement on Torch proved to be the death knell for Round-Up, which was also a result of the President's eagerness for US forces to go into battle against the Germans at the earliest possible opportunity. Had the President

Churchill. *Prime Ministers Personal Minute*. D.116/2. C.O.S. (42) 157 (0) (Final). 8 July, 1942. PREM 3/333/19

³⁷⁹ John Grigg. *1943: The Victory That Never Was*. (London, Eyre Methuen, 1980), 37.

³⁸⁰ In January 1942, Churchill survived a House of Commons Confidence vote with a majority of 464 to 1, while in July faced another vote that he won 476 to 25. Although the margin of victory for Churchill was resounding in each vote, it is possible that his Premiership would

resisted the pressure from the American public and King and MacArthur for retaliatory action against Japan, then the forces could have been in place to launch Round-Up and those committed to operations in the Mediterranean would likely have been limited to units already stationed there, for example, the British Eighth Army and the Commonwealth units. Instead, Roosevelt's desire for immediate action dispersed American assets throughout three theatres of war instead of two and Britain, retaining the larger share of Allied forces stationed in the European theatre by the beginning of 1943, continued to deflect US and Soviet pressure for the opening of the Second Front.

Roosevelt's decision in favour of Torch was a major turning point in the war and for the issue of the Second Front but as Dunn and Grigg attest; Brooke's obduracy for campaigns in the Mediterranean cannot be over-stated. An ardent believer in the principles of a Mediterranean commitment, Brooke was also a sceptic regarding the chances of success for a Second Front in 1944 and even after the Teheran Conference had concluded, he still argued in his diaries for the reinforcement of the Mediterranean and the expansion of the Italian offensive to include the Balkans and Central Europe. His experiences with the Expeditionary Force in 1940 left an indelible impression on him as to the power of the German military and this only diminished very slowly with time. His diary entries throughout the war and the reports he submitted to Churchill and the Cabinet demonstrate that he refused to believe that the Allies stood any chance of success confronting the overwhelming German power head-on and that Sledgehammer and Round-Up would only have served to sacrifice British divisions invaluable to the country's defence. His diary entries also show the gulf between himself and Marshall on this issue and his repeated claim that his American lacked the strategic vision necessary in a competent commander and a man wedded to a Second Front plan that in his opinion was doomed to failure.

Churchill was not as dismissive of North-West Europe as Brooke was and his paper to the Cabinet in June 1942³⁸¹ provides an example of his belief that the cross-Channel enterprise was a possibility. This could have aided

have faced a serious, if not mortal challenge had a British cross-Channel assault ended in failure.

Marshall's efforts for a Second Front had the Prime Minister insisted that the Allies implement it and had he not been a man so often diverted to the prospect of campaigning throughout a variety of countries and theatres. Churchill offset his acceptance of the Marshall plan not only with his enthusiasm for the Mediterranean strategy but also his belief in the possibility that the Allies would campaign throughout the Balkans, drive northwards along the Italian mainland and commence landings in Norway. One question that arises is whether the Prime Minister fully understood the magnitude of what would have been involved in launching a cross-Channel assault or whether his military commanders intentionally obstructed him as they were less enthusiastic about the scheme. A case in point that would support such a claim was the report Churchill produced on the Second Front in June 1942 in which he stated that the venture must involve a heavy concentration of firepower, mobile formations and coincide with diversionary landings in the Low Countries, Southern France and the Iberian Peninsula. Churchill's assessment was that at least ten armoured divisions would be required to invade Normandy in 1943 and that the initial landings must possess overwhelming firepower to subdue the coastal defences.³⁸² In response, Britain's military chiefs questioned whether this plan stood any chance of success and cast doubt as to whether the levels of forces that Churchill proposed deploying would have been sufficient to ensure the operation was successful. Therefore, no action was agreed upon or taken. Churchill himself was aware of the possibility of failure but had the German formations stationed there not been as powerful in number or capability, it is possible that he would have accepted the theory of Marshall's plan, most likely for 1943. As was the case with Brooke, this thesis did not uncover any evidence that Churchill's support for operations such as Gymnast, Jupiter, Husky or Crusader were motivated by political concerns. It is most likely that he pressed in this direction to avoid another Dunkirk-like defeat and to maintain Britain's military independence from the United States. Another possibility was

³⁸¹ Churchill. 'Operation Round-Up'. *Selection of Papers on Future Operations*. C.O.S. (42) 169 (0). PREM3/333/9. June 15, 1942.

³⁸² Ibid.

that he had cast his eye towards the growing Soviet threat to Europe that he believed Nazism obscured.

There was no sudden abrupt end to Britain's wartime policy regarding the invasion of Europe, its predisposition to campaigning along the Continental fringes or abrupt flexing of American power or Soviet pressure that dealt it a fatal blow. Instead, from 1940 through into late 1943, Britain was able to determine its own policy, and that of the Allies, towards a cross-Channel assault. Nevertheless, the circumstances of the war and the dynamics of Britain's relationship with the US and the Soviet Union were changing and this was illustrated throughout Chapter's 4 and 5. It was only a matter of time before the United States fully mobilised its vast resources and exercised this supremacy to demand the opening of the Second Front and the Soviet Union became the strongest land-based power in Europe with its offensives in the East. The Casablanca Conference demonstrates this ascendancy and the changing landscape of the war because it proved to be the final time in which the leaders of the US and Britain met as equal partners and the last in which British strategic preference prevailed. Britain gained the concession that Husky would succeed Torch and that the North African offensive would proceed to its conclusion, yet the consent on the part of the Americans carried the stipulation that there would be no more resources allocated to the Mediterranean and as a concession to Marshall, the forces allocated to the Bolero programme would increase. This stipulation is a major turning point in terms of the US-British alliance, operations throughout the Mediterranean and the opening of the Second Front. From this point onwards, the campaign in Italy would claw its way forward bereft of reinforcements which were allocated to Bolero and this extinguished any prospect of a Western Allied campaign in the Balkans and push into Central Europe. Dunn refers to the outcome of this summit as producing a "do-little or nothing strategy"³⁸³ and while it was a compromise to all those concerned, this conclusion illustrated Britain's military weakness and its increasing inability to determine the course of Allied strategy as it had done for the previous three years. The denial of

³⁸³ Walter Scott Dunn. *Second Front Now – 1943*. (Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 1980). 35.

reinforcements and the removal of landing craft, equipment and troops to Bolero meant that once the Allies controlled Italy, operations in the Mediterranean would cease and Britain's strategic preference was becoming subservient to that of its Atlantic ally.

A second important decision on the issue of the Second Front came at the Second Washington Conference when the Allies, under mounting US pressure, declared that May 1944 would be the definite date for the Second Front. By this stage of the war, the Soviet armies were driving the Germans back westwards and Stalin's shadow was looming ever larger over the negotiations. Roosevelt began to seek consultation with Stalin rather than Churchill and when the Teheran Conference got underway in the New Year, the relationship between the United States and Soviet Union had eclipsed the Trans-Atlantic Alliance. Britain had become a junior partner in relation to two countries whose rivalry would dominate the international system for over four decades after the surrender of the Third Reich. However, even at Teheran, Churchill and Brooke continued to advocate campaigning throughout the Mediterranean yet by 1944, their efforts were in vain. As much as they protested in their government documents and reports and for all of Brooke's arguments in his diaries that the Allies should continue on their course throughout Italy and the Mediterranean, North-West Europe became the Allies' primary operation due to the emergence of American power within the United Nations and the rise of the Soviet Union. With this ascendancy, the Second Front came to the forefront of the Allies' strategic planning and it marked the conclusion of the peripheral-based strategy that Britain had embarked upon in 1940, its ability to defer the Second Front, determine its own course of action in the Second World War and ultimately, its position amongst the world's powers.

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